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DELPHÉGOR

By

JULIEN BENDA

Translated by S. J. I. Lawson

With an Introduction by Irving Babbitt

Is then the
charm of feel-
ing so great?

— BOSSUET
Henriette d'Angle-
terre

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& Introduction &

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THE present moment in French literature would seem to be unusually confused. As a first step in getting one's bearings in a somewhat chaotic situation, one may perhaps distinguish between the writers who are still in the main modern movement and those who are in more or less marked opposition to it. This movement has been in one of its most important aspects primitivistic. Rousseau, with his tendency to disparage intellect in favor of the unconscious felicities of instinct, is, though not the first, easily the most influential of the primitivists.

Among the more prominent living opponents of primitivism one may mention M. Ernest Seillière, who has been developing in numerous volumes the thesis that Rousseau's doctrine of man's natural goodness, in theory fraternal, results practically in an "irrational imperialism"; likewise M. Charles Maurras and the group of *l'Action française*, who, seeing in Rousseauism an alien intrusion into the French tradition, seek to restore this tradition, classical, Catholic and monarchical, such as it existed, for example, in the Age of Louis XIV. The members of this group, it is important to note, are less interested in classicism and religion for their own sake than as necessary supports for what they term an "integral nationalism." There is again the neo-scholastic group of which M. Jacques Maritain is probably the most gifted member. This group parts

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company with the modern movement not merely from the eighteenth century but from the Renaissance. In his "Three Reformers" M. Maritain assails Luther and Descartes as well as Rousseau, finding no firm anchorage for the spirit short of the Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Finally M. Julien Benda is one of the most interesting of those who oppose, on various grounds, the modern movement. He is an isolated figure in the contemporary battle of ideas in France. Some might even say that he pushes his independence to a point that is slightly quixotic. He has taken issue not only with the modernists but with many of the enemies of modernism. He discovers, for instance, a temper unduly narrow and exclusive in the neo-scholastics, a proneness to look on themselves alone as true men and on all others, who are outside the circle of their orthodoxy, as "dogs and swine." He detects again romantic elements in the cult that M. Maurras renders to reason, and is unable to see that "integral nationalism" of the type promoted by *l'Action française* is genuinely Catholic or classical. Rousseau would, as a matter of fact, have the right to say (in the words of Emerson's Brahma) of many of those who profess to be reacting from him: "When me they fly, I am the wings."

M. Benda has been concerned primarily, not with

the older forms of the primitivistic movement, but with those it has assumed during the last thirty or forty years. He has been above all an implacable enemy of the form it has taken in the philosophy of Bergson, of the anti-intellectual trend of this philosophy and its tendency to present as a spiritual illumination what is at bottom only the latest refinement of Rousseauistic revery. As a sample of revery thus setting up as a "mystic union with the essence of things" M. Benda cites the following passage from M. Edouard LeRoy, Bergson's disciple and successor at the Collège de France: "Distinctions have disappeared. Words no longer have any value. One hears welling forth mysteriously the sources of consciousness, like an unseen trickling of living water through the darkness of a moss-grown grotto. I am dissolved in the joy of becoming. I give myself over to the delight of being an ever streaming reality. I no longer know whether I see perfumes, or breathe sounds or taste colors," etc.

The point of view is related to that of the contemporary French group known as the *surréalistes* who hope to achieve creative spontaneity by diving into the depths of the subrational. The *surréalistes* in turn have much in common with the English and American writers who abandon themselves to the "stream of consciousness."

M. Benda has studied above all the ravages of Bergsonism in the polite circles of French society — the circles whose traditional rôle it has been to maintain the principle of leisure. The influence of women has always been marked in these circles — but with a difference. In the older French society there were still men of leisure who set the tone and to whom the women deferred. In an industrial society like our own, on the other hand, the men are taken up more and more with business and money-making. In the meanwhile the women have been encouraged in the belief that they are richer than men in the type of intuition that Bergson exalts above reason. Hence their growing contempt for the masculine point of view. Men themselves are inclined to grant them, at least in art and literature, this superiority.

It would not be difficult to find an American parallel to M. Benda's picture in "Belphégor" of the great industrialist who bows down before his wife's superiority because she gets up at noon and plays a little Schumann on the piano. Men are even more absorbed in utilitarian pursuits in America than in France, and even more inclined to turn over to women the cultural values which have been a chief concern of the great civilizations of the past.

"Belphégor," though it continues M. Benda's previ-

ous onslaughts on Bergsonism, has a somewhat wider scope. The tendency to grant the primacy to emotion that this work assails goes at least as far back as the sentimentalists of the eighteenth century. When Faust, for example, exclaims that "feeling is all," he sums up Rousseau in his essential aspect, on the one hand, and, on the other, looks forward to "the greedy thirst for immediacy" that is the theme of "Belphégor." One may grant at most that this thirst has led in the case of certain contemporaries to a more complete sloughing off of the traditional disciplines than one usually finds in the earlier primitivists. The net result from the outset of the quest of sensation and emotional intensity for their own sake, has been, in Santayana's phrase, a "red-hot irrationality."

Himself a Jew, M. Benda attributes the decadence he describes in part to Jewish influence; but there have always been, he goes on to explain, two types of Jews — those who in ancient times worshipped Belphegor * and those who worshipped Jehovah. As a modern example of the former type, he mentions Bergson; of the latter, Spinoza. Moreover, the Jew would not have been able

* The name of this divinity appears in the Septuagint as Beelphegor and in the King James Version as Baal-peor. It has been inferred, especially from Numbers, ch. 25, that the cult rendered to Baal-peor was licentious.

to act thus deleteriously on the Gentile if the power of psychic resistance of the Gentile had not been seriously lowered. One reason for this lowered resistance, M. Benda surmises, has been the decline of classical study. It might be supposed in that case that one way to fortify the cultivated classes against an irrational surrender to their emotions would be a more humanistic type of education. But M. Benda has no hope of a return to the humanities. He anticipates a future even worse than the present — a sort of indefinite progression in unreason.

It may be, however, that M. Benda is unduly gloomy in his forebodings, that even this tree will not quite grow to heaven. It is an encouraging sign that the rightness of his analysis of the emotional excess has been widely recognized — so much so that the term “Belphegorism” has entered into current French usage. One may profit by M. Benda’s analysis without sharing what appears to be his fatalism. Confronted by tendencies which he believes to be at once bad and irresistible, he inclines at times to misanthropy. Moreover, this misanthropy seems to have its source less in his reason than in his emotions; so that certain critics have found a Belphegorean taint in his own writings.

In theory at all events, M. Benda is not only con-

sistently on the side of reason but he protects the word with a Socratic dialectic. Bergson proclaims that one can escape from mechanism and at the same time become vital and dynamic only by a resort to intuition, and then proceeds to identify the intuitive with the instinctive and the subrational. But the abstract type of reason that is at the basis of the mechanistic view of life, M. Benda retorts, is not the only type. Reason may also be intuitive. Sainte-Beuve, for example, is intuitive in this sense when, in his "Lundis," he enters into the unique gift of a writer and renders it with the utmost delicacy of shading. Intuition of this kind has nothing in common with what is, according to Bergson, the ideally intuitive act — namely, that of the chick when it pecks its way through its shell.

One may admire M. Benda's perspicacity in such discriminations and yet ask if it is enough to oppose reason in any sense to the cult of a subrational intuition and the "Belphegorism" to which it leads. According to Bergson, there are two traditions in French philosophy: on the one hand, a tradition which puts primary emphasis on intuition and derives from Pascal; on the other, a tradition which is primarily rationalistic and derives from Descartes. One would like to know what M. Benda thinks of Bergson's claim to be in the direct line of descent from Pascal. Does he suppose that when

Pascal appeals from reason to something that he calls variously "sentiment," "instinct," "heart," these terms have the same meaning for him that they have come to have since Rousseau and the sentimentalists? The truth is that the terms refer to a superrational quality of will identified with the divine will in the form of grace, and that it is this quality of will that has been weakened by the decline of traditional religion. Faith in a higher will, as it appears in a Pascal, acted restrictively on the "lusts" of the natural man. According to the familiar classification, the three main lusts (the "three rivers of fire" of which Pascal speaks) are the lust of knowledge, of sensation, and of power.

The most subtle peril, according to the austere Christian, is that which arises from the lust of knowledge. M. Benda is too thorough-going an intellectual to be apprehensive of any such peril, much less to fall, as the Christian has done at times, into obscurantism. He has probably never asked himself seriously the question that seemed to Cardinal Newman the most essential of all: "What must be the face-to-face antagonist by which to withstand and baffle . . . the all-corroding, all-dissolving energy of the intellect?" As for the lust of feeling, the reader of "Belphégor" is scarcely likely to accuse M. Benda of not being sufficiently on his guard against it. He has, again, in a

recent work, "La Trahison des Clercs" * (1928), set forth the dangers of certain modern manifestations of the lust of domination. The epigraph of this work is taken from the philosopher Renouvier, a disciple of Kant: "The world suffers from a lack of faith in a transcendent truth." One is prompted to inquire at once whether one can secure this faith in a transcendent truth simply by an appeal to reason; whether a true transcendence does not call for the affirmation, either in the Christian or some other form, of a higher will. At all events M. Benda develops the thesis that every civilized society requires a body of "clerks" (and by clerks he understands not merely the clergy in the narrower sense of the term, but thinkers, writers and artists) who are dedicated to the service of the something in man that transcends his material interests and animal appetites. Other ages and civilizations have had "clerks" who were faithful to their high vocation, often at the cost of contumely and persecution. But in our own day the clerks have been guilty of a "great betrayal." They themselves have become secular in temper, and in consequence have, instead of resisting the egoistic passions of the laity, taken to flattering them. They have sided

* English translation published at London under the title "The Great Betrayal"; same translation published at New York under the title "The Treason of the Intellectuals."

more and more with the centrifugal forces, the forces that array man against man, class against class, and finally nation against nation. They have encouraged in particular a type of patriotism that, besides supplying themes to the votaries of Belphegor, has stimulated the will to power in a form that, as M. Benda describes it, is close to the "irrational imperialism" of M. Seillière. If the clerks had been true and not traitorous, they would, instead of helping to inbreed differences, have rallied to the defense of the disciplines that tend to draw men to a common centre even across national frontiers. As a result of the clerical apostasy, M. Benda foresees wars of zoölogical extermination. He admits, however, another possibility: men may be induced to vent their fury of conquest not upon other men but upon physical nature. He enlarges upon this latter possibility in a vein that might have appealed to Swift: "Henceforth, united in an immense army, an immense factory, . . . contemptuous of every free and disinterested activity, thoroughly cured of faith in any good beyond the real world, . . . humanity will attain to a really grandiose control of its material environment, to a really joyous consciousness of its own power and grandeur. And history will smile at the thought that Socrates and Jesus Christ died for that race."

M. Benda's work may be defined in its total trend as

a sweeping indictment of the modernists by a modern. Thus far, at least, he has refused to ally himself with the reactionaries. The position of the modern may turn out to be untenable in the long run, unless it can be shown to be truly constructive; and it is on the constructive side that M. Benda is the least satisfying. The charge has been brought against him that the "clerk," as he conceives him, is too aloof, too much "above the mêlée." The contemplative life, however, may have its own justification. Furthermore, he is willing that his clerk should, on occasion, be militant in the secular order. The real difficulty is that M. Benda does not give an adequate notion of the doctrine and discipline on which the clerk is to base his militancy; nor again of the type of effort that must be put forth in the contemplative life, if it is to be more than a retreat into some tower of ivory. His weakness as a philosopher would appear, as I have already hinted, to be his failure to recognize that the opposite of the subrational is not merely the rational but the superrational, and that this superrational and transcendent element in man is a certain quality of will. This quality of will may prove to be alone capable of supplying a sufficient counterpoise to the various "lusts," including the lust of feeling, that result from the free unfolding of man's natural will. M. Benda's inadequacy in dealing with the will is

closely related to his drift towards fatalism and his occasional misanthropy. Any one who affirmed the higher will on psychological rather than dogmatic or theological grounds might perhaps aspire to the praise of being a constructive modern. In the meanwhile, a necessary preliminary to any valid construction, must be a sound diagnosis of existing evils. It is just here — as an acute diagnostician of the modern mind and its maladies — that M. Benda has put us under obligations to him. One finds in him a combination of keen analysis with honesty and courage that is rare at the present time, or indeed at any time.

Irving Babbitt

❧ *Foreword* ❧

Foreword &

These essays were, for the most part, written before 1914, that is, at a time when the French upper classes were surrounded by all the comforts usually associated with their position, the security of which they refused even to question. Time and leisure were theirs to devote to the higher emotions and particularly to those aroused by intellectual pursuits. Since then everything has changed and it is obviously absurd to talk of the "aesthetic tendencies" of a group of people whose whole interest, during four years, has been centred in the question of whether they were going to be ruined, or whether their sons would be killed, and who to-day are asking themselves with some anxiety whether the cessation of war will really mean the enjoyment of permanent peace. However, inasmuch as people who have reached a certain stage of development retain even in the midst of the most serious preoccupations some slight sensitiveness to immaterial things, this manifesting itself now and again in their reactions to questions of art, it seems to us that the aesthetic of contemporary French society is still, broadly speaking, what we have set forth in these pages. We see no reason why war, which has already proved itself less apt to modify character than we would have believed, should necessarily make any radical change in the culture of a nation and cause men who sought only emotion in

art suddenly to demand from it intellectual pleasure. On the contrary, it would seem that war intensifies the craving for emotion. We feel, for instance, that our observations upon the passion of modern French society for the vague melancholy of mysticism and upon its abhorrence of all rational thought are more than ever "founded in fact." And certainly the reception given to the latest works of MM. Bourget and Claudel proves nothing to the contrary.

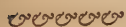
By the word 'society' we mean "good society," that is, the privileged classes who live in leisure and refinement, one of whose functions it is to devote itself to literary, and even, in our own day, to scientifico-philosophical small talk. No study has hitherto been made of the aesthetic of this class. Just as writers of political history are apt to deal only with kings, so historians of literature are content to portray the tendencies of a few exceptional minds. Yet the need which society seeks to satisfy at the fountain of art is surely an important indication of the moral and spiritual status of a class whose influence in the state is so far-reaching and whose every expression, therefore, is eminently worthy of attention.¹



¹ We should like to quote, in this connection, from the work of Mr. Ch.-M. des Granges: *La Presse littéraire sous la Restauration*.

The documents we have used in determining the æsthetic tendencies of present French Society have been mainly the confession of faith of five o'clock tea, or after dinner conversations, society magazines and reviews and more especially the works of those writers whose success leads us to suppose that they give fullest satisfaction to society's needs, or represent that class most accurately. We regret to have to say that these include not merely the second-rate writers, and that the law laid down by a certain critic² according to which good writers, far from embodying the prejudices of their time, were always in opposition to them, can no longer be said to be true in our day.

We sometimes speak, in these pages, of the bad taste of our democratic society. We mean by that, people whose tastes have become those of the masses — or



tion: "It seems to me," says the author, in his introduction, "that a literary history that took the form of a history of public opinion might be extremely enlightening." M. Paul Lacombe (*Taine, historien de la littérature*) also considers that the study of public opinion and tastes should be a part of every literary history. M. Lanson has frequently expressed the same view. But no comprehensive work of this kind has yet been written. What a marvellous subject for a young man who is willing to give up his life to it: *History of the Aesthetics of French Society!*

² Emile Faguet.

at least what one expects from the masses — indifference to intellectual values, the exclusive cult of emotion. There is no intention on our part either to condemn or to praise any particular form of government. In fact, we agree entirely with a woman of the eighteenth century: “I mean by ‘the people’ all those who think basely and vulgarly: *the court is full of them.*”⁸



⁸ Mme. de Lambert.

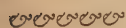
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❧ *Part One* ❧

It seems to us that the æsthetic of contemporary French society—or, to be more exact, its æsthetic demand—can be defined thus:

“Contemporary French Society demands that all works of art shall arouse emotion and sensation: it insists that art shall cease to provide any form of intellectual pleasure.”

Fundamentally, this attitude is not characteristic only of the present day. French society has from its earliest beginnings followed the dictates of women and young men, and has always shown preferences for the things that touch the heart and caress the senses over those that stimulate the mind. The most highly-praised drama of the age of “rationalism” was *Timocrate* (Thomas Corneille), and the most appreciated novel was certainly not *La Princesse de Clèves* (Mme. de la Fayette).¹ What *is* characteristic of the present day however is the definiteness and uncompromising self-assertiveness of this attitude; the diligence and methodical effort that is put forth to accomplish its ends and widen its scope; its omnipresence, even among people supposed to be the most cultivated; and above all the conscious pride with which it is recognized by



¹ See Note A at end of volume.

its devotees who build upon it all their systematic views.

We proceed to speak of some of its most important symptoms.

*That Art Must Be a Mystic Union
with the Essence of Things* ❧

One of the most striking symptoms — and one in which most of the others have their origin — is the doctrine which claims that art shall be the expression of a mystic union with the essence of things. We know that according to a popular school of the present day, the artist should dissociate himself entirely from the idea of things and from their existence in his mind; and should seek to understand them as they exist, to become one with the heart-beats and the very essence of their life, which can only be accomplished through sheer love — sympathy, intuition — and which necessarily rules out all intellectual activity: concepts, symbols and habits of speech. The modern aesthetic, according to one adherent of this school ² consists in grasping the



² M. Tancrède de Visan, *L'Attitude du lyrisme contemporain*.
Last Essay.

reality of things *independently of all expression, translation or symbolistic representation*; the method must be one of "*intuition*, a kind of centralized insight which identifies itself with the *varying rhythm of their very existence*"; this intuition (the italics are his) "does not *reflect*; it is in itself action, heart, ego." Another, inspired by a passage of William James, makes the statement that "if a rose had no name, it would lose none of the power for life and beauty which it now possesses. And it is the function of art to become one with this power, forgetting its name and in fact everything that is attributed to it by the intellect." A strangely moving task, indeed, and one which no group in society has hitherto demanded of the artist; the contemporaries of Musset and Lamartine certainly made emotion a condition of art — even one of the first conditions — but it was never pushed, expressly at least, to the point of complete exclusion of the intellect. Here we have a very definite advance!

We shall not discuss this conception of an art which rules out symbols; nor shall we mention the many great artists (Petrarch, Malherbe) who did not "become one with the essence of things"; nor yet bring up the argument that, though certain writers who used this method were great artists, (such as Maurice Barrès, for instance, in some passages of *La Grande Pitié des Eglises de*

France) their greatness did not lie in their emotional state, but in the form they gave to that state, that is, the *idea* they conceived of it. Our object here is to discuss, not the doctrines of the present day, but the urge of which they are the expression.

Let us, for example, look into the emotional urge which this doctrine involves:

(a) Art must grasp all things "in their life principle." This, moreover, is an emotion which our contemporaries demand from all intellectual activities; philosophy and science (at least, biological science) must, too, as we shall see, bring them into actual touch with the object in its essence and in its principle of evolution. Note too, that in order to add to the emotional power, this principle must not be of a moderate type, but must be palpitation, ignition and dynamics; the highest aim to-day, as we remarked elsewhere³ is not rest, but agitation; the Eternal has become passion and it is more than ever true as the poet says of rest:

"That it was *formerly* the portion of the gods."

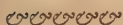
(b) Art must "become one" with this essence of life; it must not look upon it or describe it — which imply remaining apart from it — but become one,

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<sup>3</sup> *Sur le Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 175 and fol.

merge its identity, indeed lose its identity. Here is a formal exposition of this: "You have now realized," says a modern thinker in describing the attitude which according to our aesthetes should be typical of all artistic endeavour, "you have now realized that if your knowledge of the trajectory (described by a body moving through space) did not provide you with a sufficiently clear idea of its real nature, it was because you looked at it from without, *instead of merging your identity with the point which describes it, and becoming part of its movement.*"<sup>4</sup> Likewise when these learned gentlemen inform us that art "must cease to describe circles around things and must penetrate to their centre" they do not mean, so they tell us, that the artist should look upon the centre of things; on the contrary he must completely suppress looking in any form (since looking upon anything implies remaining outside of it) and must identify himself with the life of his object.

We constantly hear these prophets insisting that the artist should "become one with the inward rhythm of things"; "become the life of things," "live things." Note carefully this curious demand (it applies also to the critic, the historian and the philosopher) which is



<sup>4</sup> H. Bergson, *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, p. 146.

so prevalent and so typical of this day and age, at least in so far as it is consciously expressed. All distinction must be abolished between the artist and his subject, and the *fusion of his personality* must be so complete that he shall cease to bring either his critical faculty or any form of transcendence to bear upon it. A charming picture, indeed! The reader, we are sure, will not fail to appreciate how subtle the emotional savour, how sweet the renunciation thus suggested to our minds! And let us not forget that quite apart from this fusion of the artist with his subject, the "adoption of the life of things" is in itself a strangely exciting spectacle.

Side by side with the emotional effect of witnessing the artist passing as in a trance into the soul of things, we have also the strong emotion caused by the sight of the glowing fusion of the artist and his subject, as in the contemplation of a deep embrace. And following this we have the insistence that the artist become the life of things in which we recognize a sort of sexual desire to penetrate into and violate the inmost, secret places of their being—a desire which has nothing whatever in common with the quest of æsthetic emotion. Whereas in our analyses we have distinguished these emotions, it must be remembered that they are not so distinguished in the soul of our æsthetes where each one is intensified by the presence of the others.



(c) Art, in order to become one with the soul of things should give itself up to a state of pure love, which shall be entirely immune from all intellectual activity; in other words, it should consist of a state of pure affectivity. We shall come across other forms of this demand on the part of our contemporaries, but let us for a moment dwell with admiration upon their extraordinary capacity — so unusual among society people — to create this entirely abstract concept of a state of pure affectivity, and the methods they employ to denounce intellectual activity in its subtlest forms — symbols, images, representations, habits of speech. Hate creates genius! <sup>5</sup>

Note well that this pure feeling of things, apart from the workings of the intellect, is not, according to our



<sup>5</sup> “What is a symbol? A *sign* which replaces a *reality*. Our contemporary poets, then, refer to the reality, the innate life of things, and not to the signs and forms of their outward appearance.” T. de Visan, *loc. cit.*

With regard to the relation of language to intellectual activity it would seem that this has been recognized and respected by society in the earliest times. It is to us a matter of some concern to read these words, penned by a woman of society in the first century of our era (Sulpicia): “What is this? Can it be possible that the father of the gods would take from man the arts which are the endowment of his youth, deprive him of *language*, his *guiding influence*.”

æsthètes, a first stage in artistic development, a necessary but merely preparatory stage, on which the intellect is afterwards brought to bear, like the finishing hand of the craftsman; not at all — the fundamental characteristic of the doctrine lies just in their contention that this is the exclusive end and aim of artistic endeavour; the artist is not to become the soul of things *in order to express them with more understanding*; having achieved this stage, he has justified his claim to the name of artist and can go no further. Here is a clear and oft-heralded declaration on this point: "There is at least one group of privileged people (who exist in a state of pure perception, that is, in the feeling of things apart from all intellectual concept), and these are the artists. . . . Their sole aim is to increase their powers of perception, without seeking to rise above them."<sup>6</sup> However, faced with the fact that the artist does express his feeling, they have invented a state in which this pure feeling of things becomes in itself an artistic expression, a state which "makes it possible for the artist to create his poem at a certain moment of time, and to identify himself so completely with the



<sup>6</sup> H. Bergson, *La Perception du changement*, p. 7 and fol. quoted enthusiastically by A. du Fresnois (*Gil Blas* of June 10, 1911).

subject of his song that the expression of that song is really his own soul as it lived in the moment of conscious creation.”<sup>7</sup> But note also that in all this no demand is made on the intelligence; *feeling* creates the expression of art, and supplies all the necessary factors of an artistic whole.

It is curious to note that even the great romanticists themselves, far from recognizing this dogma that feeling alone sufficed for art, in some cases definitely repudiated it; “It is true I had soul; that is all. I have uttered an occasional cry from the heart. But though soul may suffice for feeling it will not provide for its expression.” (Lamartine.)<sup>8</sup>

This mystic communion is evidently essential to all artistic endeavour, if we are to believe these our



<sup>7</sup> T. de Visan, op. cit. p. 413. Cf. also J. Florence, *La Phalange* Sept. 1912 et passim. With regard to this theory see Note B at end of volume.

<sup>8</sup> He adds, with a quite unromantic respect for work: “I have not had time to do a perfect piece of work; for I have wasted time, which is the working capital of genius. Having been prodigal of the past, it is only my just punishment that the future should fall short of my needs.” This punishment, as we know, was not inflicted. Note: “It is true I had a soul: *that is all.*” No artist of to-day would speak of the soul in these terms.

teachers. It is not a source, among others, of art, it is the one and only source. It is but grudgingly admitted that Gautier, for instance, who depicted Venice and Toledo *from outside*, without sharing their heart-beats or clasping them to his bosom was still worthy the name of artist. This is what one finds in their essays on aesthetics, in their "arts of poetry" of which all the precepts — "fusion with the soul of things," "penetration into their mystery," etc. — apply exclusively to *mystic* art; and it never even occurs to them to mention this special application, so steeped are they in the conviction that there is no other art.

Last of all, note the obstinacy with which they insist on using the word *art* for this sort of aphasia. Why, of all things, this inept nomenclature? Why not simply "condition of the heart," "love," "mystic union"? The reason is that, the true significance of words having been fixed at a period when mental qualities were held in highest esteem, the word *art* with its flavour of intellectuality has remained always the more flattering term. The tragedy of it all is that these modern barbarians are living under the verbal régime of civilized people.

*Jan.*

This exclusively affective conception of art is expressed by our contemporaries under several other

forms, some of which show up very clearly their craving for emotion, their abhorrence of ideas:

(a) Art must be a direct perception of things, without any intermediary, or any intervening veil between us and the world. (The 'veil' refers to all forms of representation.) This tent brings us into close touch with the desperate thirst for direct contacts which characterizes our moderns, and which they strive to slake at the fountain not of art alone, but of science and philosophy; the latter, of course, must provide direct perception, immediate data, about the universe. And, most remarkable of all, they confer high praise on anyone that proves himself capable of such perception; not realizing, evidently, that the most important indication of the position of any living creature in the biological scale is just the capacity to replace the direct perception by the indirect, as shown by the animal who knows the temperature of water by the touch of its paw, right through to the man who knows it by reading the thermometer. And let us not forget, by the way, that 'direct perception' of a thing does not mean *direct view* of it, but *suppression of all view*, complete coalescence with it.

(b) Art must present things *in their reality*, and not in the *distorted forms in which the intellect represents them* (for these moderns have made the discovery that

intellect distorts everything it touches). Let us recall that this distortion of things by the intellect — which is merely the capacity of man to make the sensory world intelligible — was considered in the seventeenth century, when Descartes first made it known, as one of the great honours to which the human species could lay claim. That, too, is an indication of the progress of French society. And again, it would be utterly ridiculous to suppose that this horror of distortion on the part of our contemporaries might be a sign of their love of truth; Saint-Simon, too, distorts everything he touches; they know it and worship him for it, because, forsooth, he distorts through passion. What they object to is not that truth is impaired, but that it is impaired *by the intellect*.

At this point we must dwell for a moment on that peculiar trait of this society: its hatred of intelligence. We have drawn attention elsewhere to the various forms in which this hatred appears: persistent refusal to discriminate between intelligence and dry, unimaginative reasoning, in order to bring the former into disrepute; the attempt to make us believe that great discoveries are made, by means of a faculty (intuition) which “transcends” the intelligence, in mental chaos, in defiance of all logic, and with a snap of the fingers at intellectualism; the pleasure rather than regret they



find in setting forth what they consider the limitations, the failures of science; and their insistence that intelligence is connected with our practical, utilitarian, physical and baser needs and belongs to — indeed is identified with — the world of matter, the dregs of the universe, etc. This conscious and organized campaign against intelligence — ‘intellectual’ has become almost a contemptuous term in our drawing-rooms — is something hitherto unknown in French society. In 1830 it was unheard-of; the romantics of that period tell us that they wrote for an exclusive audience of intelligent, logical and consistent people.<sup>9</sup> This present development will be a definite mark of our time on the history of French civilization.

Note too, that these, the enemies of *all* intellectualism are ever protesting that they take exception only to a falsely conceived, an indolent and scholastic intellectualism,<sup>10</sup> and that they themselves represent true intellectualism.<sup>11</sup> Whatever its detractors may say, it is evident they must admit that intellectualism, — the word, at least — still preserves a certain inherent prestige. In the same way, the barbarian kings who came



<sup>9</sup> See preface to *Hernani*.

<sup>10</sup> Bergson, Péguy; see our *Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> Le Roy; see *id.* p. 147.



to destroy Roman civilization asked no greater glory than to be called consuls.<sup>12</sup>

(c) Art must comprehend the object in its individuality. Two meanings are distinguishable in this commandment. Primarily it means that art must create a form for each object (just as science has its category for each fact), must evoke only what is individualistic (object of sensation) and rule out what is generic (object of thought). To such subtle minds, the Huron language would be ideal, in which the verb meaning *to eat* varies according to the article consumed; or again that of the Iroquois, which has one word for the tail of a dog, another for the tail of a sheep and yet another for the tail of an ox, there being no word to denote tail in general.<sup>13</sup> This, however, is only a partial abolition of

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¹² Many an avowed intellectualist, attacked as such, will make every effort to prove he is not; Péguy (*Note sur M. Bergson*); Bergson, *Réponse à M. Em. Borel*, (*Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, Jan. 1908); Ed. Le Roy (*Revue du mois*, June 1912). Romain Rolland, in his books where he disparages intelligence, calls them 'a little paradoxical.' Barbarians ashamed of their barbarism!

¹³ The austere seventeenth century seems, at times, to have very definitely appreciated the value of the particular; Saint-Evremond, struggling with a portrait of his lady, says: "The whiteness of teeth, the redness of lips are much too general expressions for this mysterious individual charm which I try to depict." But other values came first.

intellectual activity; the idea of a single object is nevertheless an idea; a special name is nevertheless a name; and this demand for the individual in art means, most frequently, that art must comprehend its object *independently of all mental articulation* or of any name, taking only its unique, inexpressible content. (See Bergson, Le Roy, etc.)

(d) Art must present its object as an indivisible whole. Here again are two separate demands; on one hand the insatiable thirst for totality, on the other the same old desire to seize hold of the life of the object, to enter into the feeling it has of its own existence — which is certainly indivisible — as opposed to the diverse component parts which it acquires through the eyes of those who observe it from without. Under this latter heading, however, our aesthetes definitely declare their hatred of everything relating to the category of number, a hatred deep-seated in all devotees of emotion, but hitherto rarely acknowledged by society.

As regards the thirst for totality, this seems to have been very definitely felt by M. Claudel. "Claudel," says one of his interpreters with evident respect for this trait, "seeks to know all and possess all. She (Nature) has depth and totality and his failure to embrace this totality haunts and torments his spirit." Some would-be impressive quotations follow. Alas! It will surely drive Claudel and his disciples to despair to know that a

writer of antiquity expressed even a greater thirst than he; in one of the tragedies of Aeschylus, of which only a few lines have been preserved,¹⁴ there is mention of embracing Zeus who is totality and all that is above and beyond totality.

Proscription of Clarity in Art. Cult of the Indistinct

Another trait, allied with the preceding one, which marks the eagerness of our contemporaries to experience sensation through art and reject all intellectuality, is the demand that art shall avoid any attempt to distinguish between things, all clean-cut separations and definite outlines, and shall present them in their indistinctness, in their inter-penetration, in their mobility, in their fluidity. It is a known fact, on the one hand, that a discriminating perception of things is the very essence of intellectual activity; that, moreover, they are now aware of this;¹⁵ and that indistinctness, on the other hand, besides suppressing the hated intellect, creates a



¹⁴ *The Daughters of the Sun.* (Aeschylus).

¹⁵ Since Bergson's *Essay, on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* which deals exclusively of this subject.

sensation vaguely troubling and peculiarly flattering to the palate. Also, by the way, we should note that indistinctness is not valued in modern aesthetics simply as a negation of distinctness, but as an end and aim in itself. (See, for example, Bergson's *Creative Evolution: The Idea of Disorder*.)

The demand we have here emphasized is in reality by no means new. In all times sensitive souls have felt the attraction of the non-precise, of the vaguely defined; long before our day, there were those who appreciated an art that depicted moments when

"Though not yet night, it was no longer day,"

and Hugo delighted in a Cellini who could create:

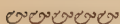
"A lily, that, becoming a woman, still remains a lily."

What *is* new, is that they will have no other art, that they despise precise art, and that what they have is not a taste for the indistinct, but the religion of the indistinct, and that in the name of a system.

How is it possible to express the indistinct with words and images, which themselves are evoked by things distinct? By accumulating expressions, instead of limiting oneself to the one that is suitable, so that collectively each neutralizes the precision of the other; by

using successive approximations, by transpositions of art, by continuous suggestion, by choosing images as dissimilar as possible so as to "prevent any single one from usurping the place of the intuition which it is meant to call forth."¹⁶ One might say that whereas the ancients used every effort to clarify words, the moderns are doing all they can to strip them of that very clarity.

This denial of outline to objects, this cult of the indistinct, is particularly astonishing when applied to the realm of plastic arts. Confining ourselves to the branch of pictorial art, it really amounts to the ruling-out of all design, concentration on painting things in their state of over-lapping, fusion, perpetual instability.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, this desire on the part of modern painters to expel the intellectual element is really expressed in another series of doctrines, whose aim, however much they seek to camouflage it, amounts to this: to represent the impression made upon us apart from the meaning our mind gives to things; for example, the

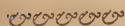


¹⁶ T. de Visan, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

¹⁷ The gesture we wish to reproduce on the canvas will no longer be a fixed moment of time in the dynamics of the universe; it will simply be dynamic sensation itself. In fact, everything moves, everything flows, everything changes its form, etc. (Futuristic dictum.)

impression we have when we wake up in the morning and things are not yet clearly correlated in our intelligence, or when we look at them, so to speak, with our head between our knees. (To use the jargon of philosophy, this is substituting sensation for perception.) There is, of course, another school in direct opposition to this; that of synthetic painting (cubism), that is, abstraction carried to excess, which seeks to reduce representation to a few elementary forms, purely mental conceptions. This is another case of romanticism — the romanticism of reason, which we shall discuss later.

Another curious point: they demand this lack of precision even in ideology. Criticism, science, even philosophy are to avoid all ideas having fixed limits, all definitions, and to use only vague colours, movable categories, fluid concepts. Writers claiming to be thinkers (R. Rolland, G. Sorel, William James) are esteemed for their mobility and for the fluidity of their doctrines. A critic is praised for his effort to avoid letting his thoughts be "moulded into a definite idea," or committing himself to definite statements.¹⁸ "Cursed be the day," exclaims one of our aesthetes, discussing one of his idols, "~~cursed be the day when that mind becomes~~



¹⁸ *Mercure de France*: Aug. 1st, 1911. *André Gide, Literary Critic.*

fixed."¹⁹ Philosophy must consist of intangible statements (for it must imitate life); the philosopher must go to work *en artiste*²⁰ (meaning: not in cold blood); cold-bloodedness 'which is admissible in mathematical calculation is altogether out of place in philosophic discussion.'²¹ A thinker of the seventeenth century (Spinoza) astonished his contemporaries by telling them that confused ideas emanated from God as well as clear ones. We should astonish our contemporaries by telling them that clear ideas emanated from God as well as confused ones! There we have another milestone on the path of progress.²²

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¹⁹ Henri Ghéon, *Vers et Prose*, Vol. XXI, p. 63.

²⁰ G. Rageot, *Revue Philosophique*, July 1907.

²¹ J. Florence, *La Phalange*, July 1912. Vagueness seems to our contemporaries to be valuable even in moral questions. "Do try to make these witnesses understand," says one of them, talking of a crime of passion, "that the human soul shuts up like a sensitive flower when one turns the lantern of Diogenes upon it! Tell them that love and hate complement each other, like the red and blue in light." (E. Julia, *Excelsior*, Nov. 28th, 1913.)

²² We know that even Fénelon (and there could be no clearer proof that he is our contemporary in thought and in disagreement with the *grand goût*) denounces, speaking of Bourdaloue, "categories whose geometric partitions interfere with thought and emotion." Even at that time he seems to have looked for-

Behind this predilection of our contemporaries for the writer innocent of clear ideas, we must not fail to recognize something which lies much deeper and is evidently usual in most groups of society, namely, that to them, weakness of intellect is attractive and mental power repellent. Let the reader cast his eye for a moment over the list of society favourites of recent years, poets, thinkers, journalists, and lecturers: so many subtle, delicate, charming, graceful minds, and so few vigorous minds! So many of the type of Meleager, Pliny the Younger, La Fare, Abbé de Choisy, Jules Janin, Caro, Bergson; so few La Rochefoucaulds or Montesquieus! So many effeminate, so few men! Naturally! What lure has mental power for those who



ward to our symbolists; he sought in poetry, (*Lettre sur un Poète de son Temps*) a *something* which is a *facility* difficult of attainment, a combination of so many things in versification as disturbing as ours; not a trace of the doctrine of Maynard, hitherto a criterion, according to whom each line must “stand forth complete in itself.” Note that Saint Simon calls Fénelon’s style (at least in Fénelon’s *Maximes des Saints*) “barbarous, obscure, nebulous.” Buffon, in contrast to Fénelon, denounces, (*Discours sur le Style*) not categories, but excess of categories, not because this excess interferes with emotion, but because it prevents “the impression of unity” which should predominate in any work of art, — an eminently intellectual aesthetic.

seek only charm? And who will deny that a certain kind of weakness has charm? ²³

Lastly, alongside this contempt for distinctness of ideas, let us note this characteristic, which was not necessarily included (for one may belittle even qualities one does possess — in fact it is considered smart). We refer to their total inability to practise this distinctness of ideas.²⁴

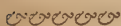
With this in mind we need only ask the reader to listen carefully to any drawing-room conversation on politics, art, religion, or love, to convince himself of the



²³ Of course, we do not include among the effeminate certain virile writers whom it has pleased to hide their decisiveness behind a veil of graceful uncertainty; mock hesitants, of whom Anatole France is a flagrant example, and one of whom once betrayed himself: "What I do, I usually do with all my faculties, proceeding *as one complete whole*; I make no move that is hidden or withdrawn from my reason, or which does not take place, so to speak, with the *consent of all parts of me*, without any disruption or internal sedition." Who speaks thus? The prince of the hesitants — Montaigne!

²⁴ Perhaps we do not always fully appreciate the fact that our disdain for certain mental qualities is coincident with our own lack of them. This observation, made with regard to a great man, has some value here: "As to logic, he does not deliberately set it aside, but his complete lack of it is the result of a natural gift, to which he owes the spontaneity of his style and the delightful charm of the unexpected." (Renouvier on Renan).

flagrant and incredible confusion of thought and the fundamental incapacity to grasp even the most trite and hackneyed ideas; he will realize at once that these people are simply floundering about helplessly, without the faintest idea, for instance, of the difference between liberty and licence, between the emotional and the æsthetic value of a work of art, between religious feeling and declared faith, between love and tenderness. By their correspondence, too, they prove time and again that they are utterly incapable of expressing the most insignificant idea — indeed the most insignificant fact, of conveying the simplest piece of information, or of setting down clearly and in proper order exactly what they want to say, exclusive of all extraneous matter. It gives us food for thought to realize that these people are the offspring of a nation whose high society was once represented by names such as Retz, Saint-Evremond, La Rochefoucauld, and Mme. de Lafayette, and in which it was quite usual for young women to make such distinctions as the following: "Passive prayer is an attribute of pure love, but pure love can exist without it." (Mme. de Grignan.) History will record with amazement this total loss of dialectical power in French society.²⁵



²⁵ Bussy-Rabutin (Dec. 1678) writes to a correspondent who has asked him to define certain terms: "We used to say that

Much the same may be said with regard to our writers. It is unbelievable what crass ignorance of intellectual principles one finds in most cases, even among the greatest. Nor do we refer to the controversial quagmire in which they wallow as soon as they attempt an exchange of ideas (as for instance the polemics of certain leading lights directed against M. Paul Souday at the beginning of the war on the question of Nietzsche, Renan, and the 'mysticism of war'). We refer to much less exacting themes. I know a case of one of our masters addressing a letter to a ministry with a view to obtaining a change in his military position; he goes about it in such a manner that in order to understand what he means they have to ask him three times to begin all over again. Another asks the readers of a leading magazine to send money for a charity. He expresses himself so clearly that for a week the columns of the magazine are filled with letters from cor-



amiability meets with respect, Mme. de Coligny (his daughter) considers that we should have said esteem, and we agree with her." And again: "I myself considered good sense and judgment were the same. Mme. de Coligny, however, insisted that good sense applies to thoughts and expressions, whereas judgment applies to conduct." It seems that the ease with which this young society woman made such subtle distinctions appeared quite natural to her contemporaries.

respondents asking for explanations. Compare with this the precision of a Racine advising his son as to the details of hygiene, or of a Victor Hugo writing to his publishers! There could be no better proof of the lowering of classic standards of culture. (On confusion of Types, see Note C at end of volume.)

The Religion of Music. Musicalization of All the Arts. Plastic Sensibility and Musical Sensibility ୭୨

An interesting aspect of our contemporaries' abhorrence of clarity in art is the quasi-supreme value they give to music, hailing it with delight as art without form, pure fluidity, art freed finally from the categories of space. Let us recall at this point the very special adoration they have for a certain invertebrate modern music, their contempt for clear and distinct ideas, or punctuation in music; they wish to have music serve as a model for other arts, so that poetry, painting, sculpture and even ideology shall be musical and imitate the pure mobility and indeterminateness of that chosen art.²⁶



²⁶ "Modern painting will be an entirely new art which will be to the painting of the past what music is to literature."

This insistence on musicalizing all the arts is the strongest indication of the diligence with which our contemporaries seek to deprive art of all intellectuality and to demand from it mere sensation such as one gets from drinking wine or from the fragrance of a flower. Moreover, music acquires its high position in their opinion not only for its lack of form, but also because of the state of pure affectivity which it is able to create, because of its close association with a realization of a pure state from which all representation is withdrawn and whose condition is vegetative and irreducible to intellectuality;²⁷ because of its power to suggest rather than express²⁸ — an operation which they now demand even from ideology; and also (though this reason is less frequently brought forward) because of a strangely troubling effect created by sound. We shall speak later of still another cult which arises out of the capacity of music to express the deep (i.e. unintellectual) recesses of the human soul.

It may be of interest, in discussing historically the respect accorded to various sensibilities throughout the

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(G. Apollinaire, quoted by M. A. Séché, *Le Désarroi de la conscience française*, 1913, p. 68. See development of this theme.)

<sup>27</sup> Bazaillas, *La Musique et l'Inconscient*, *passim*.

<sup>28</sup> T. de Visan, *Paysages introspectifs*, p. 49.



ages, (who will write this history?) to note how very recent this respect for music is. Sallust speaks of a Roman lady who sang "with more taste than is necessary in an honest woman."<sup>29</sup> In the days of the Emperors there seems to have been a strong sensibility to music and very little respect for that sensibility; Ammianus Marcellinus — a soldier, it is true — objects to this taste in his contemporaries.<sup>30</sup> More recently the great Arnaud deplored the fact that "the poisonous influence of Lulli's songs had spread throughout France"; it may be said that he was a Churchman, but would our ecclesiastics of to-day agree with him? Mme. de Motteville denounced King Louis XIII's taste for music as a sign of his sickly nature. Saint-Simon lists, among the congenital weaknesses of the Duke of Bourgogne, his fondness for music. Mlle. de Lespinasse acknowledges her taste for the art, but she only liked



<sup>29</sup> *Elegantius quam necesse est probae.*

<sup>30</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus (XIV, 6, 8) See Friedländer, *Civilisation et histoire des mœurs romaines d'Auguste aux Antonins*, p. 393 and fol. Decadence always brings a change. Statius sets forth, as one of the advantages in favour of his daughter-in-law making a good marriage, that she could play the lute, and sing poems set to her own melodies. It is true the poems were her father-in-law's! Pliny the Younger eulogizes his third wife for the same reason.



it when she felt out of sorts, which, as she remarks, is far from proving that it is high art. To-day sensibility to music is synonymous with nobility of soul; none but a few cynics, indifferent to contempt, dare acknowledge that they are without it.

This tendency of modern society can be quite clearly defined. Divide sensibility broadly into two kinds; on the one hand, the kind which is acquired through sight and touch and which, using as its armature the idea of form, derives from that origin a peculiar clarity and firmness of outline; let us call this the plastic sensibility; on the other hand, hearing, smell and taste, which, not having this armature, consist of a sensation without outline, more emotionally effective, by far; let us call this the musical sensibility. The first, undoubtedly because it acts upon the more highly developed, more specialized nerves, seems to be more definitely *localized*, affecting only a prescribed area of our consciousness; the second seems to invade the entire being. The first is a centralized, *compact* sensibility; it inculcates poise; the second is actually a sort of disintegration of consciousness resulting in a sensation that is diffuse and scattered,<sup>81</sup> and producing a state of dizzy intoxication. This point being established, it will readily



<sup>81</sup> See Note D at end of volume.

be agreed that the sensibility to which contemporary society is tending, which it acclaims in all its criticisms and doctrines, and which it insists that art shall satisfy, is eminently the musical sensibility.

In order to set forth still more clearly what we understand by musical sensibility we might also mention the sensation of love (excluding of course the idea of the object which arouses it; for instance, the sensation produced by an aphrodisiac). It is probably wiser to consider this sensation in women where, it seems, it is diffuse and scattered, rather than in men, where it is localized. (For other reasons why sight sensations are infinitely less emotionally effective than those of hearing, smelling, etc., see Note E at end of volume.)

With regard to music itself it is hardly necessary to point out that besides the kind that causes disintegration there is also the kind that stabilizes, that is, plastic music. This is the distinction drawn by Plato when he banished the Lydian mode from the State and recommended the Dorian. Bossuet, also, seems to have realized this distinction in these curious lines: "The music which Diodorus taught the Egyptians to despise, as apt to weaken their courage, was undoubtedly of the soft, effeminate type which inspired in them only a facile and spurious tenderness. For the Egyp-

tians by no means despised that generous music whose noble harmonies elevate the mind and the heart.”<sup>82</sup>

One might almost presume to say that music, considered as a work of art, is in a certain sense plastic rather than musical; that music, by reason of its essential lack of form cannot become a work of art except by renouncing its own very nature and adopting that of plastic art; reminding us of the drowning man of whom Bergson speaks who can only save his life by seizing hold of whatever solidity the water affords him. It might be argued that the creative genius of all the great composers — especially those, such as Wagner and Debussy, who delighted in the most fluid material — depends on their capacity to subordinate their love of music to the requirements of plastic art. The theory evokes an intellectual drama which may excite the imagination of our readers.

The same applies to writers who, instinctively delighting in fluid material, were yet great artists; the

<sup>82</sup> *Discours sur L'Histoire Universelle* (III, 4). Let us quote also: “Music is the mean between the material and the intellectual; it can elevate love from its material surroundings, or give to an angel flesh and blood; its harmonies become thoughts or caresses according to the disposition of the listener.” (Chateaubriand, *Vie de Rancé*, Book IV.)

author of *Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire* (J. J. Rousseau), Chateaubriand, often Loti. Renan seems to us less great in that he was not always able to impose the plastic form on the fluid material with which he liked to work.

This distinction between the plastic and the musical could also, we believe, be used in judging that type of literature whose exclusive aim is to touch our sensibilities, classed generally under the heading of romanticism. One might say that the romanticism of 1830 (except perhaps that of Lamartine<sup>33</sup>) is plastic, while that of the second half of the nineteenth century (Verlaine, Barrès) is eminently *musical*. We may recall that Baudelaire introduced the exploitation of the senses of taste and smell which Hugo and his contemporaries had never dreamt of doing. Nor can we ignore the marked and systematic predilection of our contemporaries for musical romanticism.<sup>34</sup>



<sup>33</sup> Whose favour, be it said, has greatly increased recently, precisely on account of the musical character of his work. (See G. Lanson, *History of French Literature*, p. 353.)

<sup>34</sup> Note, however, that Baudelaire seems to have felt that poetry should connect with music, in so far as the latter is plastic; "The poetic phrase may imitate (and here is established a contact with musical art and with *mathematical science*) the horizontal line, or the ascending and descending perpen-

The following is, we think, an excellent example of plastic romanticism:

“Our Bethlehemites were sitting round their camp-fire, their muskets lying on the ground, their horses, picketed, in an outer circle around them. Having drunk their coffee and talked a great deal among themselves, the Arabs fell silent, all except the sheik. In the glare of the firelight I could see his expressive gestures, his black beard, his white teeth, the varying lines of his garments as he talked. His companions leaning forward, their faces almost touching the flames, listened with rapt attention, now emitting a cry of admiration, now imitating and emphasizing the gestures of the speaker; from time to time a horse’s head, raised above the others, was silhouetted in the semi-darkness and completed the picturesque effect, with the Dead Sea and mountains of Judea in the background.” (Chateaubriand: *Itinéraire*, Third Part.)

We need hardly call attention to the extraordinarily plastic quality of this passage, its obvious desire to move us by a “vivid and well-rounded” picture (as Buffon expressed it). Nor do we need to point out how much less it appeals to our readers than do such fluidities (of



diculars; it may ascend airily to heaven or drop with the velocity of a leaden weight into the depths of hell, etc.” (*Preface, Fleurs du mal.*)

an art, by the way, at times just as happy) as *La Mort de Venise* (Maurice Barrès) or *Pêcheurs d'Islande* (Pierre Loti).

*Particular Case in Which Art Deals  
with the Human Soul. That  
Art Must Deal with No Other  
Subject*

The most violent expression of the desire for enjoyment through art, however, is manifested when art takes the human soul for its subject.

First, it seems, according to our contemporaries, that art should cease to have any other subject. It must be allowed that at no time has society given first place to works having no reference whatever to this source of appeal; Lucretius' poems attracted little or no attention among his contemporaries, and the *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes* (Fontenelle) or the *Principes de la physique de Newton* were admittedly received with less enthusiasm than *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Rousseau). At the same time the writings of Fontenelle and Voltaire were keenly appreciated in their time, and that not only as mere revelations of fact (as in our day such vulgarizations as Fabre's works on insects), but as *liter-*

ary manifestations. As for the *Epoques de la Nature* they aroused real enthusiasm. Where to-day can we find that goodly company of men who would wax enthusiastic over such works, who would class as literature writings which do not treat of the human soul — except in so far as this is included in the form of the *Life of the Bee*, or *The Intelligence of the Flowers* (Maeterlinck)? Witness that all the precepts of modern aesthetics *apply exclusively to art that deals with the human soul*, the artist must enter into the inner being of the object he deals with, must become one with its life principle, etc.; and so little does it occur to our contemporaries that art could possibly deal with any other theme that this is not even articulated.

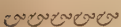
“The only material with which we felt capable of accomplishing anything was the ever new, ever palpitating theme of man, man, and again man. In these days when one risks not being recognized unless one wears some distinguishing mark on one’s hat, shall we choose a slogan? It shall be *Life First* — life, long and patient, active, full, complicated — life, drunk with human-ness. (*Les Jeunes Gens d’aujourd’hui; La Jeunesse Littéraire*, Jacques Copeau.)

The disdain, however, with which the *Entretiens* of Fontenelle would be received to-day is due less to its being a work that deals with things inanimate, than



to its dealing with them from outside. We may be sure that *L'Esprit des Lois* (Montesquieu) or *La Cité Antique* (Fustel de Coulanges) would meet with little more enthusiasm; for they deal with man, it is true, but by analytical methods, from outside. On the other hand, communion with Sirius in its inward heart-beat would probably be received with loud applause.

Again, it is not only in art that our contemporaries insist on the human soul and that alone; the same happens in philosophy and in science. We know their enthusiasm for that philosophy — the true and only philosophy — which consists entirely in the description and exaltation of a certain soul-state ("duration"); their worship of that biology the sole aim of which is to identify the evolution of life through the course of the centuries with the evolution of our individual consciousness.<sup>35</sup> Note, in passing, their absolute insistence on using the words philosophy and biology, and not simply psychology for the first and poetry for the second, as they should properly be called. Always this desire to live in a world of pure feeling and at the same time preserve an outer semblance of intellectuality, to satisfy a kind of scholastic urge!

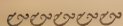


<sup>35</sup> As you know, this is the main theme of *Creative Evolution*.

Is it necessary to point out that this attitude on the part of our contemporaries has nothing in common with that of the seventeenth century which also devoted its attention principally to the human being, agreeing with Bossuet that "to become the perfect philosopher man need only study himself"? Their ideal, like that of Socrates whose cloak they inherited, was to acquire an entirely objective and scientific comprehension of human nature; they had no desire to fill themselves with material that was particularly "palpitating" or "drunk with human-ness." Neither does the seventeenth century seem to have admitted literary subject matter other than that of man; certainly readers of the *Maximes* (La Rochefoucauld) or *Caractères* (La Bruyère) would never, as did their predecessors, have classed as literary a Montchrestien dealing with political economy or, as did their successors, a Galiani, writing on the corn trade; but the reason was their belief in the eminent dignity of human kind, not their desire to go into transports over its human-ness.

Thirst for the human soul, and for that alone, makes itself felt continually in present-day society. Conversations one overhears, whether the subject be the amorous adventures of Mme. X. or the intrigues of her rival or again the machinations of Z. to attain to power or to the *Académie*, are all manifestations of this

thirst. Probably, in varying proportions, this has always been true of the salon. But in former days one occasionally came across society women who stopped to wonder what the rouge was made of that they put on their cheeks, or how the stockings they wore were manufactured; <sup>36</sup> they have even been known to pounce upon books which provided such information and to worry the government official who suppressed them until he authorized their publication. The officials of our democratic age have no such worries; they are entirely at liberty to suppress all encyclopaedias and enlightening literature of every kind; as long as they do not interfere with books that thrill the heart, there will be no expostulations from the ruling classes. Can you imagine the mistress of a present-day executive demanding that the government publish Larousse? <sup>37</sup>

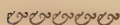


<sup>36</sup> Everyone knows the famous passage in which Voltaire tells of the enthusiasm of Mme. de Pompadour and her friends for the Encyclopaedia. (*Edition du Centenaire*, p. 278.)

<sup>37</sup> The most conclusive proof of the chasm that lies between us and the eighteenth century is that in the midst of all their sentimentalism they still preserved their interest in things inanimate. Think of these women who read *Pastor Fido* (Guarini) and at the same time welcomed the advent of the Newtonian doctrines and the works of Buffon, attended the lectures of the botanist Morin and visited the laboratory of the chemist

*Digression — Emotions of Sympathy and Aesthetic Emotion ❧*

This demand — common, really, to all ages — that art shall treat exclusively of the human soul, brings out the following truth: What the majority of men seek, in contemplating a work of art, is an opportunity to indulge in the *emotion of sympathy*; what they really want is to love with des Grieux, to hate with Iago, to tremble with Desdemona, to sigh with Phèdre, to die with Werther. Moreover, they derive but little pleasure unless the emotions depicted are of a kind that they can share; it is useless to take plays that deal with abstract problems of right and wrong to popular quarters, or expect women to be interested in the struggles of the seeker after ideas; for the same reason, the theatre, of all the arts, attracts them most since it affords an opportunity of sharing, even physically, in human emotion, of taking part in the gestures, and of experi-



Leméry. Pure *littérateurs*, such as Houdart de la Motte, prided themselves on combining literary attainment with a knowledge of physics; the author of *Lettres Persanes* (Montesquieu) had already written a paper on the nature of the echo, and was preparing a *Physical History of the Earth*. On the present indifference to the inanimate world, see our work *Le Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 182.

encing what has been termed *organic sympathy*. Need we say again that the emotion of sympathy has nothing in common with æsthetic emotion? <sup>38</sup>

What then, do we mean by æsthetic emotion? It is perhaps time we explained. It is the emotion caused by the idea we acquire from the really artistic qualities of a work of art; for instance from the life of a work (the



<sup>38</sup> The moralists of the seventeenth century clearly showed that the emotion of sympathy was the basis of the pleasure derived from the theatre; "What did Corneille want when he wrote his *Cid* if not that we should love Chimène, share Rodrigue's adoration of her, his anxiety when he fears he may lose her, his joy when he hopes to possess her?" (Bossuet, *Maximes et Réflexions sur la Comédie*.) Nicole puts it bluntly: (*De la Concupiscence* XXXI) "Inside the spectator there lurks always the actor." Spinoza seems to have denounced in a word this taking of the human soul as a basis of enjoyment of the theatre or of novels: "If we imagine a being like ourselves having a certain feeling, we ourselves involuntarily acquire that feeling." (*Ethics*, III, 27.)

We are aware that according to a German theory, known as *Einfühlung*, sympathy is said to be bound up with all æsthetic feeling, including that derived from the inanimate world; it seems we desire to stand up straight with the vertical line, lie down with the horizontal, roll over and over with the circle, overflow with the stream, sigh with the wind. (See *German Philosophy in the XIXth Century*. Alcan, 1912.)

life of a work of art is quite distinct from the life of the characters it presents to us), from the unity of its meaning, from the adjustment of form to substance, from its right proportions, from the gradation of effects, etc. A good example, borrowed from society can be found in Mme. de Sévigné, who appreciates the perfect correlations in *Esther*.<sup>39</sup> This emotion is evidently of a high type and very rare; it really pre-supposes, first, that one is capable of forming abstract ideas (what for instance could be more abstract than the idea of perfect correlation?); second, that these ideas shall not remain with us as pure ideas, but shall be transmuted into



<sup>39</sup> Here is a passage on the exposition of *Bajazet* which we consider also a good example of æsthetic emotion: "Observe how the poet works up and develops his material (subject, events, etc.) simply and unobtrusively; watch closely the progress of this scene, how the plan of the piece works itself out, falls into place and arranges itself quite naturally, with no noticeable interference from the poet, how all the difficulties smooth themselves out; how basic and necessary to the intelligent understanding of the piece are the questions and answers of Acomat and Osmin; how these two actors tell the story without seeming to tell it, instruct us without obvious intention to instruct. You will realize the truth of what I say, and the more judgment you have the more you will be charmed by the artistry of the scene." (Longepierre, quoted by F. Deltour, *Les Ennemis de Racine au XVII<sup>me</sup> Siècle*, p. 406.)



feelings. Aesthetic emotion is the prototype of the emotion having an intellectual basis.

We must allow, however, that aesthetic emotion *in a pure state*, does not exist, and that, for instance, however strongly we may feel the purely artistic value of *Tristan* this feeling will always be modified by the discomfort caused by the misfortunes of Yseult, and by listening to the chromatics. Only low emotions are capable of purity.

We have just pointed out the emotion of sympathy as an example of an emotion produced by a work of art, which has nothing in common with aesthetic emotion. We might quote other examples; when we see a lovable character who is unhappy; when we observe the tenderness of an author toward his hero (Chateaubriand, for instance, when Chaſtas buries Atala); when we imagine the brain that creates the work of art, the will that weaves the threads behind the canvas, (it is our craving for this emotion that makes us will that Homer shall have lived; for aesthetic emotion the poems suffice without an author); when we realize the bond that exists between the work we are considering and what it represents in the author's life; I confess, for example, that I have never been able to see the curtain fall on the studio scene in the *Meistersinger* without thinking how it was falling on twenty years of the life



and thought of the Master, and being moved thereby; etc. . . . All this, we repeat, has nothing to do with æsthetic emotion.

*That Art Shall Present the Individual Soul ❧*

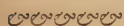
Let us look, now, at this insistence that art, in dealing with the human soul, shall induce an emotional thrill, not an intellectual effect.

In the first place, art must present the individual soul, not souls in general, which would necessitate thought. A plague on our classic writers who efface the distinctive markings of their characters and show us only types! To think that Molière does not even tell us whether Harpagon was a nobleman or a bourgeois! Whether Arnolphe was a provincial or a Parisian! All honour to the masters across the Channel who tell us how much their hero weighs, what he eats for lunch, what sort of sheets he sleeps in—in fact, show us living beings! <sup>40</sup>



<sup>40</sup> Is this the reason why the Marquise du Deffand wrote to an Englishman: "Since reading your novels, I find it impossible to read ours"? We think rather it was because of the senti-

Let us not confuse this modern movement with that of Saint-Evremond, who asks the author of *Mithridate* and *Bajazet* (Racine) for "more particularity in his descriptions"; or of Segrais, who exalts Corneille because he makes "the Roman speak like a Roman, the Greek like a Greek, the Indian like an Indian." In these we have simply a desire for truth, not a craving for the concrete, through hatred of general ideas. Moreover, the "particularity" that they asked for in the portrait of the hero was that of his "period and nationality" — which still leaves plenty of scope for generalization.<sup>41</sup>



mental satisfaction she got from them. We know that Taine (*L'Ancien Régime*) (see also his eulogy of Tacitus, in *Tite-Live*) takes vehement exception to the generalizing tendency of our classic writers — which he recants, by the way, in his *Philosophie de l'art*. To us it seems that the aim of *L'Ancien Régime* is simply to point out that these methods of abstraction, carried by the eighteenth century into the field of politics, could only be productive of mistakes. Besides, Taine speaks elsewhere of "our classic writers, pure minds, who have brought scientific accuracy to the portrayal of the moral world, and thanks to whom we feel it is good to be men." (Study of Stendhal, inserted in the first edition of the *Essais de Critique et d'Histoire*.)

<sup>41</sup> On the subject of the seventeenth century poets and local colour see Note F at the end of the volume.

Little more than in the present day, it seems, were philosophic

It must be admitted that our contemporaries' demand for the particular in art has met with but meagre response; the individual is poorly portrayed in present-day French art, especially in the theatre; characters such as those of Henry Bataille's *Marche Nuptiale* or *Maman Colibri*—to take one of the authors most loudly acclaimed as a creator of living characters—seem to us just as little individualized, just as exclusively treated as symbols, as those of Molière or even of Dumas Fils. It's not so easy to be a barbarian!

At this point, our critics will undoubtedly instance our contemporaries' taste for the symbolic theatre of M. Maeterlinck. Is it worth our while to retort that what they enjoy in this is that dreamy uneasy mood

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works appreciated by the society of the seventeenth century for the general applicability of their teaching. Bossuet's sermons, always generally applicable, were given second place not only to those of Bourdaloue, which were full of allusions to the particular, but even to such scribblers as Fromentières, Le Boux, Le Père Séraphin, for just this reason; Bossuet, leader of thought as he was, seeking always to portray "psychological types," received far less appreciation than Fénelon, who was eminently clever in bringing out whatever there was of individuality in a soul. Let us not forget that *Marianne* by Tristan L'Hermite, in which the public recognized allusions to the amours of Buckingham and Anne of Austria, had, apparently for this reason, as great a success as *Le Cid*.

created by drama that sets aside all conditions of time and space? It would be difficult to prove that the taste for *The Bluebird* and *Pelleas and Melisande* comes from any desire to acquire ideas as to the human soul. Here is really the soul-state that governs the taste for this type of drama:

“Somewhere, hidden in the mist, is an island, and on the island is a castle, and in the castle is a big room lighted by a little lamp, and in this big room there are people, waiting. What are they waiting for? They do not know. They are waiting for someone to knock at the door, waiting for the lamp to go out, waiting for Fear, waiting for Death. They speak; yes, they utter words that break in upon the silence for a moment; then they listen again, leaving phrases unfinished, gestures incomplete. They listen. They wait. Perhaps she will not come? Oh yes! She will come. She always comes. It is late; perhaps she will not come till to-morrow? And the people gathered in the big room under the little lamp begin to smile, and continue to hope. There is a knock, and that is all; it is a whole life, it is all of life.” (R. de Gourmont, *Le Livre des Masques*: Maurice Maeterlinck.)

It is quite obvious that the thirst for general ideas has little to do with the taste for such “symbolic” art.

That Art Shall Present the Soul Independent of All Laws. Hatred of All Determinism. The Quest of the Emotion of Surprise. Thirst for Novelty ❧

Another aspect of the effort to experience emotion from the representation of the human soul is the insistence that the artist shall depict the manifestations of soul in the hero independently of all laws, and that each manifestation shall be unforeseeable in its relation to its predecessors. "The great interpreters of the soul," says one of our aesthetes, "be it Stendhal, Tolstói, or Meredith, have never attempted to produce a natural history of a temperament, or to treat it like an anatomical specimen. In depicting a character, they confine themselves to seeing it live and throwing light on it at every turn. When Fabrice enters a church to pray God to aid him in his projects of simony, a new trait is shown up which completes our knowledge of him but which is in no way mechanically connected with his previous actions. However familiar we may be with the generous impulses of Pierre Besoukhof, we experience a certain feeling of surprise as we watch him preparing with charming ingenuity to assassinate Napoleon." That here there is sheer desire for surprise

(which has nothing to do with art) our aesthete frankly confesses: "This element of surprise," he adds, "which the scientific mania of the last century had removed from the novel, reappears to-day. It is a delight to find it in works such as Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe*. Perhaps in future the novel will cease to be a pedantic theorem and will again become the true mirror of life." ⁴² This "scientific mania," this "taste for pedantic theorems" is simply an effort to make art not "the true mirror of life" but an attempt to comprehend life. But that is what our contemporaries would avoid at all costs.

It would not be fair to confront a member of present-day society with the opinion of the seventeenth century as expressed by a humanist such as Boileau, and to recall his famous lines:

"If then you form some hero in your mind,
Be sure your image with itself agree,
For what he first appears he still must be."



⁴² The *Temps* of August 8th, 1911: *Le Testament Philosophique de William James* by Philippe Millet. An article of great interest in connection with this subject. Here we have a vivid picture of a representative of the world of culture embracing anti-intellectual doctrines, and actual revolt against the scientific spirit, at least as applied to matters of the soul.

Let us rather take a man of his own standing, who praises Horace "for having taught us that if an author undertakes to write a tragedy the subject and characters of which are quite unknown, then he must take particular care in the drawing of these characters. Each must be sustained from beginning to end, and there must be no inconsistency even in the slightest detail." (Ch. de Sévigné, *Critical Essay on Horace's Ars Poetica, being a general review of drama, and an examination into whether a poet should prefer known characters to invented characters*. Vol. XI. of the works of Mme. de Sévigné, Hachette Edition.)

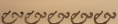
Notice also their hatred of psychological determinism, and determinism in general. We know their adoration for the philosophy which insists that psychological phenomena be determined neither by heredity, environment, nor any external circumstances, but solely by themselves; and a work of art or even of speculative thought, provided it have any claims to genius, — and romanticism only considers such — must in no way depend on the social or political conditions in which it is created, but only on "personalities which come to life at a given moment," that is, it must be unforeseeable.⁴³



⁴³ H. Bergson's Response to an inquiry on literature before

No one will fail to appreciate how sensational and moving is this evocation of the psychological phenomenon — an absolute beginning — together with the belief in the complete autonomy of our personality in relation to the world in general, either past or present. Remember, however, that thirty years ago, the doctrine of complete determinism had thrilled romantic souls; “I accept my determinism” was a favourite theme (see the first books of Barrès); they revelled in the idea of the fatality of the ego. The romanticists are willing to accept anything except moderate views.

Note that in repudiating the determinism of Taine, they have rejected the determinism of the ego through circumstances, but have held on to determination through the past (“we are governed by the dead”) and also through race. Because these latter are lyric themes, opportunities for emotion, which the first is not.



and after the War. *Correspondant*, December 15, 1915. See in the above quoted article in the *Temps*: “They (Bergson and James) have at last delivered us from the nightmare of determinism.” Let us quote also this cry from another member of the upper classes: “your admirable Bergson has just annihilated determinism.” (P. Loti, *Un Pèlerin d'Angkor*, p. 232 and fol.) For the causes of the everlasting unpopularity of determinism among the upper classes, see our work *Sur le Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 69 and fol; p. 203 and fol.

To sum up, it is really the whole cosmos that they want to see freed from law. Among the more keenly appreciated articles of this philosophy, which they make their Bible, is that the intimate essence of the world is of the same nature as our consciousness, that each moment of it is unforeseeable in relation to its predecessors. The idea of an organically disordered world is one source of emotion that French society apparently had never dreamed of!

It must be stated, too, that their objection to admitting any law, their delight in pointing out the exception crops up in all departments of life. Speak of the chivalry of French kings — they will bring up Louis XI; of the classic order of seventeenth century literature — they will quote you La Fontaine; of the rationalistic tendency of French philosophy — they will come back at you with Maine de Biran. Obviously, the very idea of a rule, or of consistency irritates them; the tranquillity that comes with general ideas, the calm that delights you, exasperates them; they desire only:

“With restless whim and devilish delight,
To put your heart’s tranquillity to flight
As a child o’erturns a glass.”

And then, too, the idea of the exception is productive of shock, of thrill; Spinoza was drunk with eternity; it is

quite appropriate for the layman to be drunk with contingency.

Our contemporaries' quest of surprise in art appears in another form which we shall refrain from taking up, because it comes so naturally to them that they are no longer conscious of it; it is the demand that the subject of the work of art be *new*. Let us remark that, in spite of anything that may be said to the contrary, this demand was not unknown in what has been called the golden age of wisdom. Undoubtedly, seventeenth century men of the world, such as Bussy and Ch. de Sévigné (see above quotation) frankly placed invention lower than composition; an amiable ecclesiastic (le Père Rapin) wrote in 1670: "In eloquence it requires less genius to invent than to arrange"; Boileau's disdain for invention seems to have been approved of in his time; Pascal and La Bruyère evidently placed but slight value on the originality of the subject-matter, when the former says: "The selection of thoughts is invention" and the latter: "Material is not new, but the manner of its treatment is." Corneille, however, states in one of his dedications: "You know the temperament of our people, they love novelty, and I risk *non tam meliora quam nova* on the hope of being more entertaining; in *L'Examen du Menteur* he says himself that he "would give his two best plays to have

invented the subject." La Fontaine in his preface to the *Fables* writes (not without some bitterness): "What do they want to-day? They want novelty." At the end of the century Fénelon alone persisted in deprecating novelty. Perrault considered it one of the proofs of the superiority of the moderns that "there is ten times more invention in *Cyrus* than in the *Iliad*. Very soon La Motte will be boasting that his fables have inventive merit which La Fontaine lacks. In fact, according to La Harpe, Greek tragedy bears the stigma of a real æsthetic blemish in that the prologue does away with surprise. It seems that throughout the centuries it has been the prerogative only of a very small and unaggressive minority to refrain from stipulating that works of art shall provide the shock of novelty.

Our moderns do not confine themselves to demanding novelty in the subject; it must be present in the style of the author, in his mode of composition, in his conception of the type he is dealing with, in his manner. The infatuation for Péguy is evidently largely due to his writing "as no one ever wrote before"; and I know of a youthful publication recently reproaching Anatole France for having "donned the shoes of past ages," meaning that he had not invented a manner peculiarly his own. This æsthetic, too, dates far back in France:

Voltaire praised the writers of the seventeenth century because all their works had been "of a type unknown to antiquity"; Marivaux declared, before he had even found any subject, that he was resolved to present a new form of comedy, preferring, as he said, "to take his humble place in the back row with the little flock of original authors, than to sit proudly in the front stalls with the literary apes." (These apes are sometimes known as Molière or Racine!) There we have, laid bare in all its self-consciousness, the romantic cult of originality in art. Let us recall that in certain disciples of Moréas we had formerly a cult, no less vibrant, of non-originality (the poet must deal only with the commonplace, etc.).

*That the Artist Shall Live the
Emotion He Is Dealing With and
Not Rise Above It by Means of
His Understanding ❧*

The most significant element, however, in their desire to get emotion and only emotion through the portrayal of the human soul, is the insistence that the artist place himself inside the feeling he is dealing with, that he espouse the principle of internal activity, that

he become this feeling, that he live it; not that he live it in order to better understand it, but that he live it and *stop there*, definitely outside of all intervention of that accursed intelligence which arrests the movement of life. We are familiar with their declared contempt for the analytical novel, in which the author remains outside the workings of the soul he depicts; and also, on the other hand, we know their high opinion of a work in which the author seems to be dissolved in the passions of his characters and bereft even of the faintest desire to use his judgment. "The novelist," says one critic, speaking of, and exalting an illustrious contemporary, "has been conquered by his heroine; he has espoused her madness. Be it Alissa, Michel or Candau, though at first he may condemn or approve of his puppets, the moment he begins to depict them he has lost the power to judge."⁴⁴ Such a poet taking Jeanne d'Arc or the Virgin Mary as his subject, is lauded to the skies because, it seems, he espouses the feeling of his heroine, in pure action, pure urge from within to the exclusion of all arrangement or order in the depicting of this sentiment. We must admit that the demand for emotion has never been more ingenious. What, really, could be more touching



⁴⁴ Henri Ghéon, *loc. cit.*

man to contemplate the exercise of human passion in himself? What courage, what novelty, to demand such a spectacle from art! Here is something that neither Alexandria, nor Byzantine Rome, nor Tyre, nor Carthage, nor any romantic group have ever thought of! There is, after all, something new under the sun!

A poet, whom Aristophanes wants to ridicule, makes this statement: "I mean to espouse the soul of my characters. When I depict women I must adopt their morals. Oh yes! If I compose *Phèdre* I must set about making love." *There* is an author whom our aesthetes would worship! In Athens, three thousand years ago, an audience of sailors and porters burst out laughing at him. See how we have progressed!

This insistence that the artist shall espouse the active principle of the emotion he deals with has, of course, nothing to do with Saint-Evremond's praise of Corneille "for having penetrated to the depths of his characters' souls to find out the motives of their actions," or having "gone deep down into their hearts to watch the passions develop and to lay bare the inmost secret of their movements." To the critic of the seventeenth century, the important thing is to see the motive, to lay bare the development of passion, not to espouse these passions, not to live them apart from judgment.

Our contemporaries' desire that art shall be emotion itself, not the contemplation of it, takes also this form: art, they say, shall present the emotion in the indivisible flow in which it rises, not in its broken-up and truncated form, as the intellect sees it, from without. Again an infinitely moving form of realism — and, moreover, a concept that society people found rather difficult to arrive at — and one which no group of society, even the romanticists, had ever dreamed of requiring from art. The farthest they had ever gone was to require it from mysticism. Note that in this indivisible flow which to them represents human emotion, the idea of flow is one source of emotion and the idea of indivisibility is another; our aesthetes are able to immerse themselves in each separately as well as in the combination of the two.

This desire that art shall be life itself, and not a picture which the intelligence paints of life, reveals itself through various symptoms which it would be well to recognize:

First, there is the incredibly large proportion, in contemporary literature, of novels written in the direct style, that is, the hero "I" himself relates his emotions and thus re-lives them under the eyes of the reader. This method, by which the author is cut off (unless by some artifice) from all reflections on passion such as

made the greatness of a La Fayette or a Stendhal, seems to be the method, *par excellence*, of the modern novel.

Also, there is the cult of the theatre, because this form of art presents human emotion by the direct method; it seems to show us life itself, and allows us more effectively than any other art to forget the mind through which we are looking at it. Note, with regard to this, that it is not the mania for the theatre that is new. This has always been a mania of French society, formerly perhaps more pronounced than it is to-day: no eighteenth century dinner-party, however modest, was without its theatricals; the Duchess of Bourgogne never stirred without a troupe of comedians; the Maréchale de Belle-Isle built herself a house with an auditorium. What *is* peculiar to the present day, is the æsthetic cult of the theatre, the desire to see in it a higher form of art. You could never have persuaded our ancestors, or even their women, that the art of Tabarin or d'Ennery was greater — simply because it was theatre — than a story or a novel.

It cannot be too strongly insisted that the logical conclusion of this contemporary æsthetic is really the apologia of the theatre. Surely the latter is, *par excellence*, life itself, and not an idea of life, "reality, and not a distortion made by the intelligence"? In fact, some of them have recognized this: one of our æsthetes

thinks he has discovered, and hails this movement by which, "the novel is in process of adopting the habits of the theatre."⁴⁵

However, there is a still more inevitable conclusion arising from this aesthetic of life itself, namely, the apologia of the comedian; an apologia, too, which is expressed in its commandments; "It is essential," says one of the exponents of the doctrines of contemporary art, "it is essential to re-live the existence of the character you are treating . . . to be coincident with that character, to be no longer the spectator but the actor."⁴⁶ Elsewhere the same writer speaks in praise of a knowledge of life (intuition) which shall be lived rather than represented, acted rather than thought.⁴⁷ However, whether it be through lack of definite awareness of their own desires, or for some other reason, the supremacy of the comedian's art over all others has never been formally pronounced by our contemporaries.⁴⁸



⁴⁵ H. Bernstein, speaking of a novel of M. Binet-Valmer (*Matin*, Mch. 10th, 1916). It is true that this aesthete is a master of the theatre. One finds a similar sentiment in another man of the theatre, (Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 210).

⁴⁶ *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, p. 144.

⁴⁷ *Creative Evolution*, p. 158, p. 199.

⁴⁸ For them, evidently, the comedian would be a great artist in proportion as he espouses the passion he represents without rising above it to understand it; which is directly opposed to

This is a step that the æsthetic of life has still to make.

Another form of their veneration for the art that presents 'life itself' is their enthusiasm for certain products of the mind that are really nothing but a vital urge which cannot rouse itself from that state of pure urge in order to judge itself, or express itself: chronicles, memoirs, souvenirs, intimate letters.⁴⁹ There is in particular their cult for the works of Saint-Simon, the example of pure passionate action absolutely free of all anxiety to face about and survey or control itself, which they admire for just that; and not content with being moved by it, they proceed to confer upon it a real artistic value, some even setting it up as their model. When one reads the author's definition of his own manner: "Repetitions, at too close intervals, of the same words, synonyms too numerous, obscurity often arising from length of sentences, or from repetition," does it not seem that one of our new Masters (Péguy), who fell on the field of honour in 1914, has taken great pains to qualify as a



Diderot's *Paradoxe*. Nothing shows better than this *Paradoxe* how profoundly intellectualistic the eighteenth century æsthetic is, whatever may be said to the contrary.

⁴⁹ "For some of these letters (Soldiers' letters of 1914) I would give the most beautiful lines of the most beautiful poem." R. Rolland: *Above the Battle*. It is true the writer makes frank profession of despising art.

signatory to this programme? However, the esteem — the literary esteem — for these *Mémoires* aroused by the fact of their consisting of pure passion, by no means dates from this dishevelled age of ours; sixty years ago, a very sedate critic — though in general he seeks humanity rather than art in mental activity — comparing Saint-Simon's work with that of La Bruyère, betrayed his preference for the living writer who "returns home, and, heated as he is, sits down pen in hand and at full gallop, without rest, without revision, pours out his soul upon the paper, etc. . . ." (Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, II. p. 6.) Elsewhere the same critic (*Portraits de Femmes*, p. 20) dares to put the style of these *Mémoires* alongside that of a Bossuet or a Sévigné. Here again we must go back to the non-democratic ages to find men capable of realizing that the emotional power of a work has nothing to do with its artistic value, capable of saying that these *Mémoires* gave them inexpressible pleasure and at the same time were badly written, that they "filled them with transport" yet their style was abominable. (Mme. du Deffand.) To a society woman of to-day, the fact that a book fills her with transport is a proof of its artistic value, indeed, that is the only real criterion.⁵⁰



⁵⁰ As regards this criterion, see Note G at end of volume.

Note this criticism by a woman of the eighteenth century of a style which we know our contemporaries consider one of the finest. Moreover, nothing could be more characteristic of their aesthetic than the praises they heap upon a style bristling with effective phrases like so many sword-thrusts, yet proving by its syntax that the author is so completely incapable of grasping the inter-connection of his ideas that he does not always finish his sentences. Saint-Simon, be it said, by no means shares this aesthetic of style: "I do not flatter myself," he says, "that I know how to write."

I would also draw your attention to the delight with which our contemporaries exhume rough copies and first drafts, their reverence for unfinished, unpolished sketches, in which the author's reasoning faculties have not yet "sullied the clear fountain of his emotions"; for instance, for Bossuet's *Sermons* because they are only sketches, above all for Pascal's *Pensées* because they are unfinished. At one moment they exalt a writer (Péguy) because instead of presenting a complete and rounded thought, he asks us to accompany him in his gropings; instead of showing us his house ready built he takes us over the scaffolding.⁵¹ At another moment they abuse



⁵¹ See *Nouvelle Revue Française*, November 1909.

an editor ⁵² because in publishing the works of a master he suppresses the variants which he admittedly possesses. In all this, their dogma is that in bringing order into an emotion, you lose it. As though it were not the whole problem of art to *bring order to it without losing it*. As though the author of the *Confessions* (Rousseau) or the *Souvenirs de Combourg* had not succeeded in keeping the emotional value while yet bringing order to it. As though art did not consist in being able to distinguish, amidst the tumult of passions with which a given action overwhelms us, that which is the central passion, to recognize the ties that bind the others to it, to bring them into proper relationship, in short, to fulfil the great master's words: "Strength comes from order" (Taine). Apparently, however, our aesthetes have no inkling that any such problem exists. ⁵³

They are careful, of course, to draw the usual contrast between works lacking in composition but full of material, and ordered writings that are void of material, comparing Montaigne's essays, the form of



⁵² M. Gaspard-Michel, editor of Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris*. I have myself witnessed certain of these vituperations.

⁵³ On the worship of the *Pensées* because of their lack of order, see Note H at end of volume.

which is so neglected that the title of a chapter has frequently nothing whatever to do with the content, and, generally speaking, these "uncultivated but fertile fields" with "beautiful gardens, symmetrically laid out, in which nothing grows."⁵⁴ But what of the beautiful, symmetric gardens *where things do grow*? Those of Buffon? Of Spinoza? Of Taine? They are carefully not mentioned.

Under the influence of this aesthetic of life we find certain of our authors protesting that they know nothing of the qualities that go to make a writer, properly so called, and are entirely nature. Like the Wagnerian hero who thought he knew music because he had listened to the birds, one of our most brilliant women of letters writing from her country seat in answer to a journalist, says: "I do not know if Latin helps, as you say, in the formation of a French writer. I don't know. I have never thought about that. It's hot here, I am well, etc."⁵⁵ Formerly, writers devoid of technique tried to pretend they had it; to-day men who are full of it are trying to make us believe that they do not even know what it is. Such is progress!



⁵⁴ A. de Bersaucourt, *Etudes et Recherches*, p. 403.

⁵⁵ Collette Willy, *Mercure de France*, Dec. 1st, 1911.

That the Pure Exercise of the Emotion Is Also Its Intellection

A curious thing: this pure exercise — specifically unintellectual — of the human emotion, is actually its intellection. We know that according to our aesthetes, the pure vital urge, essentially unconscious and devoid of understanding, becomes — by dilation and expansion — aware of itself and capable of reflection on its object.⁵⁶ In other words, the passion of Phèdre, being dilated, becomes the activity which creates Racine's tragedy, and the growing of trees creates botanical treatises. Here again, the modern demand is new only in its intensity; the sentimentalists have always insisted that sentiment was itself the science of sentiment, indeed its only science; Mme. de Staël states



⁵⁶ *Creative Evolution*, p. 179. See a paraphrase of this doctrine by J. Florence in the *Phalange*, July 1912. According to M. Claudel, feeling implies knowing, there being no necessity even for dilation of the feeling.

Let us quote also the words of Suarès, which one of our aesthetes (M. Fr. Lefèvre) recently adopted as his epigraph for a study on *La Jeune Poésie Française* (Rouart, 1918): "Deep love has the true knowledge." Another (*Revue Germanique*, Jan. 1914) bows down and worships Nietzsche's words: "Write with your blood and you will find that blood is spirit."

that "love teaches more about the mysteries of the soul than the subtlest of metaphysics"; and Michelet declared that sympathy with human life was the source from which Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire drew his excellent biological methods.⁵⁷ Moreover, one can imagine how delightful it must be to assure oneself that by the comparatively simple process of living a passion, one becomes a profound observer of it; it is obviously highly agreeable to Mimi Pinson to suppose that by reason of the beating of her little heart the power of her thoughts on love becomes greater than that of a Stendhal or a Spinoza.

In their desire to show that the true understanding of a feeling is the prolongation of the feeling itself, the argument they use is that in history the persons who have revealed the deepest insight into human feeling are those who have experienced and lived that feeling. Granted. But here is the debatable point: Is the activity by which they acquired this deep insight into the state



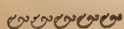
⁵⁷ The passage is worthy of quotation. Having spoken of the devotion of the great savant, during the massacres of September, in trying to rescue the unfortunate priests, Michelet adds: "To him who had shown such courageous sympathy with human life, God gave as reward the power to penetrate into the mystery of life and to understand its transformations, as no one else has ever done. The heroism of love revealed nature to him, and through his heart he entered in."

of the heart of the same nature as that by which they experienced it? Is it possible to pass from one to the other by a process of dilation, that is, by continuity? Or is there a duality of origin, a hiatus between them, even granting that the former may require the latter as a necessary antecedent? One need only propound this problem in order to solve it. "The majority of women do not require to be loved; they only want to be preferred." I admit that a Lespinasse may make this profound observation because she has experienced the torment of unrequited love; I do not, however, believe that she arrived at it by a prolongation of her state of suffering, but rather by bringing into play quite a different function, namely, an extraordinary acumen in forming concepts and connecting them one with another; if you will pardon this treason against democracy, I dare even to believe that the uncultured little seamstress, possessed of nothing but her suffering, may dilate it to the end of her days without arriving at any such conclusion. Again, I admit that a Du Bartas may have produced his admirable description of the horse because he made a practice, every morning, of getting down on all fours and kicking, prancing, neighing, in fact *being* a horse.⁵⁸ I have an idea, how-

⁵⁸ See Sainte-Beuve, *Tableau de la Poésie Française au XVI^{me} Siècle*, p. 100.

ever, that the elaboration of his picture is an activity of quite a different order from that of his neighing. No one has ever denied that living an experience is a good preparation for understanding it, though it is disconcerting to think that Froissart, who never left his canon's armchair, described battles better than anyone else, that Balzac's picture of the sufferings of an anxious mother has never been surpassed by any woman;⁵⁹ and that Virgil, who in all probability did not get down on all fours, has described a horse in at least as happy terms as Du Bartas.

Elsewhere they talk to us about a vital urge which instead of dilating to become an intellection turns back on itself. We would ask: how then can the vital urge derive *from itself* even the desire to make such a move? Is not this desire a breaking away from the very nature of the pure urge? an alien importation? really an intrusion of the critical spirit? Elsewhere, as a matter of fact, the doctrine formally proclaims this: "instinct alone will discover those things (of vital depth); but it will not seek them." Once more, let us keep in mind throughout the two-fold aspiration of our aesthetes: to steep themselves in the purely emotional and at the



⁵⁹ *Mémoires de Deux Jeunes Mariées.*

same time to keep the glamour they continue to attribute to the intelligence.

*Other Demands Implied in Those
We Have Just Mentioned*

Behind this insistence that the artist must eliminate himself in his hero there are emotional desires other than that of contact with the emotion in action. There is, first, the desire of which we spoke above, to witness an abolition of distinction, a fusion of two objects into one, — singularly disquieting spectacle when the objects are two souls. (The taste of our contemporaries for this sort of spectacle is shown again in the avidity with which they swallow the so-called catholic teachings (Ed. Le Roy) that the world is a direct emanation from God and that there is no discontinuity between the source of life and the resulting product; making of these doctrines, whatever their high-priests may say in moments of embarrassment, a brilliant modernization of the Alexandrian theory of emanation.) Then there is the demand that the artist, besides not remaining outside the soul he is treating, must also not remain superior to it. There we meet a demand very usual in our time which one might call hatred of the transcend-

ence of the author in relation to his subject, because transcendence invariably implies judgment and freedom of mind, but it flares highest when the subject is the human heart.⁶⁰ It is laid bare in their attacks against analysis, which they like little enough when applied to the inanimate world, but which infuriates them when brought to bear on the human heart. Permit us to quote here a passage already quoted elsewhere, by one of their leaders, which is a marvellous exposition of their rancour:

“When we read such proclamations of the intellect bent on showing the existential conditions of absolutely everything, we feel — quite apart from our legitimate impatience at the somewhat ridiculous swagger of the

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<sup>60</sup> The public of to-day seems to say to the author: “You present us with a human emotion; your part is finished; disappear, intermediary!” This evidently is one of the reasons for the public’s love of the theatre where this disappearance seems to obtain, and particularly of its taste for the drama of M. de Porto-Riche (on the wane only on account of political motives); just recently (*Paris-Midi* of 11th Dec. 1917) a critic hailed the latter’s intention to give “the direct truth, life itself, without symbolic transposition,” therefore making it possible for the spectator to remain in ignorance of the author’s thought.

On the other hand, see M. Lanson’s penetrating article (*Boileau*, p. 150) on the desire of the seventeenth century to have the artist as intermediary between ourselves and life.

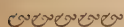


programme, in view of what the authors [Spinoza and Taine] are actually able to perform — menaced and negated in the springs of our innermost life. Such cold-blooded assimilations (vice and virtue are products like vitriol and sugar) threaten, we think, to undo our soul's vital secrets, as if the same breath which should succeed in explaining their origin would simultaneously explain away their significance. . . ." (William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 9.)

Might we suggest that if these authors' explanations were better, the writer of these lines would not be any the less annoyed, and that his anger is aroused against analysis, not because it explains feeling badly, but because it presumes to explain it at all? Last of all, bound up in the demand that the artist should eliminate himself in his hero, be conquered by him, and lose all critical faculty, there is the desire to see him not only refrain from transcendence but become dominated, crushed, annihilated by his subject; a poignant spectacle, indeed. And the most curious fact of all is that such a desire should become conscious, formulated, organized; let us add that this is one of the elements of success in women writers, who are usually, as I heard a critic remark in their praise, "dominated by their subject instead of dominating it."

## Religion of Subjective Art

To desire that the artist become one with the soul he is depicting leads naturally to the demand that he depict his own soul. With whom could he become more at one? This is the cult of subjective art already set forth by the romantics, but consciously adopted only in our time. Not only have they practically laid down the principle that the artist may only express himself;<sup>61</sup> not only have the majority of the writers revered during the last twenty years confined themselves almost exclusively to the subject of their own soul;<sup>62</sup> not only have works co-substantial with the author and the life of the author (Pascal, Nietzsche) been more systematically revered than ever before; they have even set out to define, in the interior of the ego, an ego more profoundly ego, more unique, more



<sup>61</sup> "My greatest faith," declares Mme. Aurel, "lies in the future of the book that betrays the inward man; no longer will time be wasted in transplanting one's work, that is, in attributing the ideas presented to some outside person." (*Mercure de France*, May 1st, 1911.)

<sup>62</sup> Péguy, Claudel, Suarès, Romain Rolland (according as one considers *Jean Christophe* as a revelation of the author's soul or as a new journey of Anacharsis). Furthermore, do we not search in vain for an author of any repute since France and Hermant, who has taken social customs for his theme?

individual, more incommunicable (that of pure sensibility, purged of any idea, particularly of any general idea), and to demand that it be through this ego that the artist express himself; (hence the strong preference for Baudelaire over the romanticists of 1830). In other words, they laid down the law that this ego could not be expressed by an artist using his intelligence to observe his own heart; but only through a mystic communion between the two, by a sort of aphasic and unintellectual self-embrace, the contemplation of which — remembering the incommunicableness of the ego — must obviously be deeply disturbing. It will be seen that French society's demand for the enjoyment of subjective art has made considerable progress since *Le Lac* (Lamartine) and *Souvenir* (A. de Musset).

The subjective aesthetic, too, is so ingrained in the mind of our contemporaries that they do not even imagine that there can be any other. Our young people would probably be as completely stupefied on learning that a great master could once have written the following lines, as we, on learning that groups of people have existed who did not worship courage and honour:

. . . C'est là qu'un grand peintre, avec pleine largesse,  
D'une féconde idée étale la richesse,  
Faisant briller partout de la diversité,  
Et ne tombant jamais dans un air répété:

Mais un peintre commun trouve une peine extrême  
A sortir dans ses airs de l'amour de soi-même;  
De redites sans nombre il fatigue les yeux,  
Et, plein de son image, il se peint en tous lieux.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly, the reproaches of egotism which these lines contain would be considered to-day as so many compliments to a writer. Note: "whereas a *common* painter." Concentration on self taken as a sign of vulgarity of mind! Sic transit. . . .

Let us note also the taste, (diminishing, it is true, since the war,) for the cult of the ego. I mean, for authors who concentrate on themselves, not in this case in a mystic and frenzied embrace, but as a studied form of enjoyment, a kind of elegant dilettantism. The spectacle of a soul thus inhaling itself with calm delight is, if not moving, at least heady in the manner of



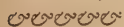
<sup>63</sup> Molière, *La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce*. In Saint-Evremond, speaking of Petronius, we also find an apology for "diversity."

'Tis thus the genius in the fulness of  
His bounty, and the wealth of his ideas  
Will cause each thought to scintillate and shine,  
Nor lapse into reiterations dull.  
Whereas the common painter seeks in vain  
To free his work from wearisome self-love,  
Again and yet again he tires our eyes  
With his own image, painted everywhere.

a perfume; and one can readily understand the attraction of such effects for certain advanced sensibilities; the author of the *Jardin de Bérénice* (Barrès), unsavory enough with his much vaunted ideological lyricism, does not evidently please the less because of the aroma of vanity. And here, by the way, we touch upon a characteristic remarkable from various points of view; namely, that French society, the descendants of men who not only said "the ego is hateful" but that "it is ridiculous to talk always of one's self, even *to* one's self" (Saint-Evremond) should enjoy authors whose sentences begin with: "I like . . ." "I am pleased . . ." "I feel that. . ." This is a fact which will not fail to astonish the historians of French education. And again, an author who deliberately outrages the reader's sense of fitness seems to meet with the approval of the modern public (this is surely one of the elements of Péguy's or M. Claudel's success); wantonness invariably has an emotional effect and besides we are aware that for certain delicate souls there is a sensational pleasure in being despised. (See the annals of eroticism.)

*The Demand That Art Shall Depict the Soul in Its Elementary State*

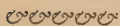
Again, let us note that in their mania for experiencing emotion from the exhibition of the human soul, there is a subtlety which never occurred to their predecessors; namely, their demand that art shall depict the soul in the infinitely intangible state when it is pure instinct, pure desire, pure action. We know their veritable cult for that art (Maeterlinck, certain Russians) which depicts only the most elementary feelings—surprise, anger, fear, and especially sexual instinct—and which delights to depict them in their instinctive form, untainted by any moral sentiment, still less by any idea, or by any organization or consistency either of feeling or direction (all intellectual); which strives to show them in their complete fluidity, in their pure quality of embryonic states, of inquietude of soul. It is clear that for our aesthetes the capacity to depict these is in itself a criterion of art. I have before me lines in which a critic <sup>64</sup> makes much of the skill of one of our authors in depicting the soul of women in its purest mobility; quite obviously in the opinion of the critic



<sup>64</sup> M. Maurice Donnay, speaking of Mme. Collette Willy's *L'Entrave*, (*Matin* of Oct. 24th, 1913).

this achievement indicates a very different type of high art from that of creating Julien Sorel or Baron Hulot; much better! According to the modern aesthetic, the purely instinctive is so fundamentally and obviously the only true artistic material that it is unnecessary to postulate the fact; "Among all my heroines," says one of our most respected dramatists, "there are three for whom I must admit a certain predilection: Jeannine in *L'Enchantment*, Maman Colibri and the heroine of the *Marche Nuptiale*. Jeannine perhaps more than the rest, "because she is pure, unadulterated instinct." The author adds no explanation, since it seems to him impossible that this reason should not suffice to justify his preference.<sup>65</sup>

We know that one of the reasons for the special cult



<sup>65</sup> This adoration for the presentation of pure instinct, unencumbered by any form of organization, has produced in our contemporaries a special cult, in classic drama, for *Bajazet*. ("Personages of the court, but of the court of assizes," says Albert Guinon, apparently with complimentary intent.) As though the heroine who says: "I would lose my revenge in taking it so promptly" were not manifesting a passion strongly influenced by a clear insight into her own soul. As far back as 1838 an occasion arose to defend Racine against those who insisted on finding a pure instinctive in Roxane! And who took up the cudgels? The romanticist Musset! (*Mélange de Littérature et de Critique*; revival of *Bajazet*.)



for music above the other arts is precisely the unique capacity that music has for expressing these phases of the soul in its elementary state. And now they insist that it shall express nothing else; the soul of Iseult is much too organized! And what has music to do with a Hans Sachs, the Herr Professor? Or Wotan, the garrulous sociologist? This æsthetic of the elementary soul leads naturally to the almost exclusive presentation of women and children, as is shown in the works to which we refer.

In all this we would wish the reader to understand us very clearly. We do not contest the right of the purely instinctive to its place among the materials of art. We even believe that credit is due to our age for having introduced it. But we do contest the modern demand that it shall be the sole material of art, the material *par excellence*. Because, you say, it is the only reality? As though intelligence were not just as great a reality! As though Goethe's soul were less real than Mélisande's! Because it is the root of all being? But who says that art must deal exclusively with that region? Give us your real reason: because it is more exciting!

The desire to express only the elementary states of the soul is frequently combined, by our authors, with the desire to express themselves. Women excel particu-

larly in this expression of the ego in its elementary soul-state; here is a rather good example: "I was there, but rebellious, silent and out of harmony, because of a lizard that appeared and disappeared magically, a sprig of lavender swaying under the weight of a bumble bee furred with brown and orange, the call of an invisible shepherd, the clean-cut lacy shadow gently stirring beneath an olive tree." <sup>66</sup>

We are aware of the liking, indeed, the very special literary esteem accorded this type of work.

We have not drawn attention to another type favoured generally, in which women excel. It will be noted that all the literary attributes exalted by contemporary aesthetics are those with which women are most highly endowed, and which form a kind of monopoly of their sex; absence of general ideas, cult of the concrete and circumstantiated, swift and entirely intuitive perception, receptiveness to sentiment alone, interest centred on the self, the deepest, most intimate and most incommunicable self, etc. . . . The modern



<sup>66</sup> Collette Willy (*Le Matin*, May 16th, 1912). A movement of the same type may be found in a poem by Gondinet and Ph. Gille:

"Why am I saddened by the song of the dove,  
A faded flower, or a leaf that falls? . . ." (Lakmé, Act. I.)

aesthetic is entirely made for women. Men struggle. Many try to imitate the literature of their rivals. Alas! They must succumb; there is a degree of unintellectuality and shamelessness to which they will never attain.

We say nothing of our contemporaries' demand — which they do not even express, so much do they take it for granted — that the portrayal of the human soul shall be exclusively that of love. This dates back three hundred years in French society. Let us recall, however, that in the seventeenth century there were some protests, not only from artists little skilled in the portrayal of this sentiment, such as Corneille; not only from men of the Church such as Rapin or Bouhours; but from men and women of the world, Bussy, L'Abbé de Villars, Subligny, Saint-Evremond, Mme. de Sévigné. Does one find any of our society women objecting to the drama of M. de Porto-Riche because he deals too exclusively with the subject of love?

Their demand that art shall depict the elementary soul is, moreover, incidental to their demand that art must necessarily be profound, that it depict only the profound regions, and profound recesses of the human soul. As though great artists such as Ronsard or La Fontaine were profound!

And again, our contemporaries' aesthetic, in so far as it worships the representation of these regions in

which speech is silent to make way for pure feeling, pure action, tends directly towards the cult of the comedian. And by the way, the cult of the comedian as pure gesticulator is to-day quite definitely established; I have before me a page in which a man of society exalts a comedian for the "back" he makes in a certain scene.<sup>67</sup> We should notice also how the playwright more and more deliberately takes the comedian as pure gesticulator into account for his effect on the public.<sup>68</sup> I have come across a man of incredible capacity for contempt, as bad a writer as he is a clever playwright; he has never conceived a phrase without associating it in his mind with the comedian who was to play it. He has replaced the direction of passion with passion itself, substituted gesture for dialogue, and the slapstick for repartee. He was applauded not only by the pit but in the best drawing-rooms. And his detractors copied him.

The cult of our contemporaries for elementary life, their contempt for life that has evolved, appears not merely in their aesthetic. In their views on the living world, in their biological philosophy the only form of life that interests them is obviously elementary

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⁶⁷ *Temps*, Nov. 5th, 1907.

⁶⁸ Notice in this connection the abundance and detail of business indications in modern drama. Racine has none whatever.

life, protoplasmic life; it is to this life alone — so exclusively that they do not even believe it necessary to warn us — that all their definitions of life apply (incessant change of direction, incommensurability with the idea, etc.); life that seeks to pass beyond this moment, to stabilize what is changeable, to solidify what is liquescent (for instance, an animal's effort to become vertebrate); this has no interest for them, in fact it is a defection from life, a return to inert matter.⁶⁹ And so, according to them, the only activities of consciousness which exact from the psychologist a discriminating attention, an exceptional method (an overthrowing of ordinary knowledge, a catastrophe of thought) are the elementary, unorganized activities. It seems that it requires only the simplest methods to understand the activities of a soul that has evolved and functions by concepts — as in the case of a Descartes, for instance, forming the idea of substance. The most significant thing, however, in their everyday life, in their opinions as men of the world, is the supreme worship of mobile,



⁶⁹ In this connection there could be nothing more suggestive than to compare the biological philosophy in vogue to-day with that (of Herbert Spencer) which was pleasing to our fathers; *Creative Evolution* brings into prominence almost exclusively the attribute of *mobility* in the phenomenon of life, the *Principles of Biology* that of *organization*.

impulsive, live writers, their contempt for meditative men, (I say contempt, for they do not find them merely boring, they consider them inferior). I know of a young Countess, an ornament of our drawing-rooms, whose whole process of thought is an orgy of disconnected somersaults, her reasoning a cyclone of impressions, her opinions a jingle of images; she revealed the scope of her intellectual powers when she compared the profile of the wife of an illustrious poet to that of a fish-knife, and likened a hirsute member of our Institute to a squirrel in felt slippers. Society not only loves her and fusses over her like a child; they find in her a specimen of humanity superior to Newton.

This young countess sometimes reminds us of a passage of Proudhon: "I have a little girl, three years old; looking for words for things she sees, she calls a cork the key of a bottle; a shade is the lamp's hat; the elephant at the Zoo is the nose-foot; an icicle is a stone of ice; the teeth of her comb are the comb's fingers, etc. This child has now all the philosophy she will ever have or that any woman can acquire by her own effort, namely, approximations, analogies, faulty comparisons, flashes of wit; no definition, no analysis, no synthesis, never a really adequate idea, never the faintest shadow of a concept."

This systematic admiration of people because of their vivacity of mind rather than their judgment seems to be a recent trait of French Society. It was evidently unknown prior to the nineteenth century. Retz mentions Mme. de Chevreuse as the only woman "in whom vivacity makes up for deficiency of judgment" — a merit he obviously little appreciates. Everyone knows that Mme. de Scudéry in her portraits, places judgment infinitely higher than imagination; that she considers it complimentary to a woman to say, for instance, that "however quick her imagination, it never got ahead of her judgment."⁷⁰ Consider likewise for a moment the standard of value expressed in these lines: "Her mind (speaking of the Duchess of Maine) requires no turns of phrase, no figure of speech. It receives vivid impressions and reflects them like a mirror, without additions, without omissions, completely unchanged. So it gave me keen pleasure to hear her talk." (Madame de Staal-Delaunay.) Could there be any more definite line of demarcation between past and present French society than just such praise, by a society woman, of another society woman's objective mind?



⁷⁰ Portrait of the Countess of Maure, in *Le Grand Cyrus*.

Demand that Art Shall Be Exalted. The Perfecting of the Lyric Material

Another aspect of our contemporaries' desire to experience emotion through the product of the intellect is their extraordinary and almost exclusive taste for an exalted or at least pathetic form of literature. It may be said that with very few exceptions (Anatole France is one, and his fortunes suffered in consequence) every popular author for the past twenty years (MM. Barrès, Maeterlinck, Romain Rolland, Suarès, Claudel, Péguy, Adam, L. Bertrand) has been of the vibrant, strained, high-strung type. Temperate, restrained writing seems to have lost all aesthetic value in French society, which is extraordinary in the descendants of men who welcomed La Bruyère's writings with such enthusiasm and brought out eighteen editions of Montesquieu in two months. Would it be possible to-day, we wonder, to find a woman of the world who supposed she was deprecating an author's work by saying that his "clarity was that of lightning, and his warmth that of fever" ? ⁷¹ . . . Most interesting of all, however, is the



⁷¹ Mme. du Deffand on J. J. Rousseau (July 29th, 1776). *Le Mercure Français* of July 27, 1793 also criticizes adversely the constantly exalted tone of the literature of that period.

veritable genius that present-day society has acquired, using the authors as a medium, for bolstering up this kind of literary exaltation and multiplying tenfold its effectiveness as a source of emotion.

First they have intensified to fever heat the natural sources upon which lyricism has drawn ever since it existed, and which a romantic ⁷² once enumerated with all possible candour: love, religion, patriotism, melancholy. We need only mention some of our dionysians to prove to what extent love lyricism has been intensified since the days when the anodyne writings of a Desbordes-Valmore were considered the last word in erethism. As regards the religious lyric we must agree that the ecstasies of a Lamartine are as the prayers of a little girl beside the "self-immolation in the divine" into which our moderns plunge with a Verlaine, or beside the Jehovic thunderbolts they brandish daily with a Claudel. The war-cry of a Barbier, a Delavigne, even a Déroulède? They are but the squawking of a toy trumpet beside the hue and cry against the foreigner and the fanfare of Gallicism that blares forth as they sit by the fireside with Roſtand. And, incidentally, the emotional power of patriotic lyricism has been in-



⁷² De Blosseville. (See Des Granges, *La Presse Littéraire sous la Restauration*, p. 230.)

creased a hundredfold by the very clever modern trick of associating with it other forms of lyricism which have no real connection — that of race, keeping faith with the dead, national determinism, and historical romanticism. As for the lyricism of melancholy, it may be said that as a purveyor of voluptuous dissolution, it is an invention of our time. What chance have the merely oratorical disillusionments of an Olympio, or the plastic melancholy of a Chateaubriand against the pleasure that may be shared with Barrès, when, laying bare his soul, he abandons himself, in sweet yielding, to spineless, invertebrate lassitudes? How could Léopardi or Leconte de Lisle, all form, all concept, in their worship of death, hope to compete with the intoxicating delight of giving way to pure sentiment, purged of all idea, such as *La Mort de Venise* provides? Michelet seems to have had a presentiment of this, fifty years ago: "Listen to her (Weeping Death), the priestess equivocal, vague, soft-spoken; floating down a river of dreams she mingles pain with something that one loves, sweet sacred tears — of sorrow? Of joy? We know not. . . ." ⁷³ The literature of death will be our contemporaries' donation to France. ⁷⁴



⁷³ Michelet, *La Bible de l'Humanité*, VIII.

⁷⁴ Perhaps we have not sufficiently stressed the fact that Chateaubriand describes melancholy with anything but rever-

They have also intensified another traditional source of pathos — the lyric of mystery. One might even say that they have actually created this. Can there really be serious comparison between what this form of lyricism meant to our great writers of 1830 — who use the epithet “mysterious” among the hundred other epithets included in the bric-à-brac of the romantic school and almost automatically, like the “rosy-fingered” dawn of Homer or the “incorruptible” counsels of Zeus — and the assiduity with which our poets consciously adopt this point of view to the extent of devoting whole books to it (Maeterlinck)? Add to this the insistence — which so delights their audience — on ignoring everything except what appears to them mysterious and rejecting as unworthy of notice whatever appears intelligible. “I throw aside a book the moment it loses its mystery,” says one of their faithful spokesmen.⁷⁵ They would cheerfully say, in contradistinction to a famous line: “The only thing that one tires of

ence. (See *Génie du Christianisme*, Book III, Ch. IX: *The vague element in passion*. He denounces the influence of women.) Let us also quote: “I had, or thought I had that ugly disease, doubt, which is at bottom merely childishness — when it is not prejudice or pose.” (Letter of Alfred de Musset to the Duchesse de Castries, 1840, quoted by Arvède Barine, *Alfred de Musset*, p. 24.)

⁷⁵ *Le Voyage de Sparte*, p. 9. (Maurice Barrès).

immediately is understanding." Note, too, how amazingly this field of lyricism has been extended: how they have managed to add to the mysteries that sufficed for our forefathers (of love, of woman, of children) others no less moving, of race, of crowds, of animal life, etc. . . .⁷⁶ And most remarkable of all is their expressed desire that art shall no longer simply supply them with the idea of mystery, but shall free them from every idea and allow them to enjoy, with half-closed eyes, and mouths agape, the eternal unintelligibility of the universe. With Victor Hugo, they wanted to *speak* of the mysterious, but with Maeterlinck they must become one with it. Here is definite progress.

In all this, one point is very significant; the creation of an entirely new and extraordinarily fertile source of lyricism. We refer to moral, or rather, moralizing lyrics. With veritable genius, they divined the possibilities of pathos to be found in extolling some particular moral, political, or æsthetic movement, and included the idea of value or the supremacy of some particular manner of being or of feeling among the legitimate subjects of lyric writing. They thereupon proceed to be thrilled — with Nietzsche for the supremacy of



⁷⁶ Let us not forget the increasing exploitation in literature of the Christian mystery. (See Note I at end of volume.)

war morality, with Barrès for that of will-power, with M. Bourget for that of tradition, with M. Maurras for that of culture, intellectual discipline, and reason, with M. Romain Rolland for that of spontaneity and lack of culture, etc. And, by another master-stroke, they decreed that a moral or æsthetic mode of thought cannot be demonstrated, but only felt and loved; that, consequently, an apostle of any particular idea cannot be held to any proof, any logic, any coherence. Thus are the doors thrown wide to the ill-considered prophecies of a Péguy or a Claudel, and to statements as tyrannical as they are gratuitous, as noisy as they are contradictory; a veritable catapult of words, exceeding all the dreams of the veriest glutton for emotion.

We say they are thrilled by the supremacy of reason. As a matter of fact, we see nothing to prevent love of reason from becoming a lyric theme like any other. It is quite simple to clap one's hand to the sword-hilt, strike the Castilian attitude and shout: "I am a classicist!" Like the hero of a contemporary novel, who brandishes a chair over his interlocutor's head and yells: "You see in me, Sir, a moderate Republican!" Reason has always had its romantic possibilities, but nobody had thought of it before. (See Note J at end of volume.)

Note, too, that beside this moralistic lyricism there

exists a real moralism, an absorbing interest in moral passions. It is well known that boudoir conversations are more apt to turn on moral or political than on intellectual or literary questions. And there is a noticeable and deliberate tendency to weightiness and dogmatism in dealing with these questions, an absolute taboo on lightness (in the better sense of the word). We have referred elsewhere⁷⁷ to an author eminently capable of light treatment as proved in his youthful works, who deliberately suppresses his smile in deference to the demands of society. We would also draw your attention again to the fact that even prior to 1914, when they had as yet no presentiment of the danger ahead, French society was lost to irony.

Yet another stroke of genius, toward the same end, was the inclusion of certain scientific and philosophic theories under the heading of lyric themes. These were of course first simplified and deformed to suit the needs of such treatment. The result has been that we have Taine's theory of determinism and more particularly race determinism, lyricized by Barrès, the theory of the conservation of energy, lyricized by Nietzsche and M. Maeterlinck (under the title of the eternal cycle), Quinton's theory of biological constancy, lyricized by M. Bourget, the theory of the unconscious,

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⁷⁷ *Les Sentiments de Critias*, p. 184.

lyricized by M. Maeterlinck. This scientifico-philosophic lyricism is moreover the result of the romantics' tireless and somewhat patronizing effort to keep in close touch with high abstract thought. We know that while clinging desperately to Sienna and Granada, our poets love to quote Kant and Schleiermacher, thus satisfying the two requirements which together characterize a democratic society: thirst for emotion and scholarliness.

One of the results of this aesthetic has been that more than one of our contemporaries has imposed upon himself a lyric form, quite out of keeping with his natural form of expression. "They all carry the thyrsus, but few are possessed of the god," as Plato said. And of this has been born a castrated lyricism, a sort of saturnalia of school-teachers, of which M. Romain Rolland is a fairly good example. It is Rollin in Capri. And, finally, despite all their efforts, certain of our Pindars have failed to eliminate the critical spirit. It is always there, though

"Wallowing in the mud, it thinks to hide itself."

M. Paul Souday⁷⁸ has pointed out certain passages (perhaps the best) of one of the most swashbuckling foes of this critical spirit, which are themselves pure criticism. O, pitiless analyst!



⁷⁸ *Temps*, January 31st, 1912.

*Demand That Criticism, History,
Science and Philosophy Shall Be
Moving. Pan-Lyricism*

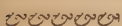
Finally, and most audacious of all, comes the demand for emotion, and nothing but emotion, from criticism, history, science and philosophy.

Even the critic's activities must consist in sympathizing with the character he is discussing, in coinciding with the dynamics of his being, independently of his intellect or his judgment. Pure mystic unions with the soul of Villon, Pascal, Beethoven, Tolstoi, Doſtoiewsky, Saint Augustine, simple heart-states, simple acts of love, have for this reason been hailed as true criticism, the only criticism. Subjectivism and lyricism have definitely been held up as values. One writer reproaches a critic for having failed in his judgment of a work supposed to be purely critical (*Les Jeunes Gens d'Aujourd'hui* by Agathon), because he had missed the "lyricism, the sentimental quality which is its whole interest";⁷⁹ another, attacked as to the insufficient documentary evidence contained in one of his works which is obviously intended to be expository



⁷⁹ J. Florence in opposition to M. Paul Souday (*Les Ecrits Français*, Jan. 1914).

(*La Colline Inspirée*) seeks to justify himself by complaining that they do not take him "in his flow, in his abundance, in his trend"; a third, brought to book for the critical inanity of his study of Saint Augustine, which was definitely dogmatic in tenor, tries to disarm his opponent by stating that he had striven to "communicate with the soul" of the great man. Note that in this our aesthetes are not bent on giving the critic's personal sensibility the share to which it has a right in the general effort to understand human actions — a right which a so-called scientific school — "everything card-indexed" — had failed to recognize;⁸⁰ they are really bent on giving it the whole field of activity, to the exclusion of all else. Subjectivism must be *the* method of criticism.⁸¹ The exalted tone, the *os magna sona-*



⁸⁰ Let us recall that this right was formally recognized by a thinker whom our subjectivists persecute nevertheless with a very special hatred: by Herbert Spencer, in his passages on "æstho-physiology" or the science of the facts of consciousness. (*Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1.) "The position of æstho-physiology," he says in particular, "is quite unique. It belongs neither to the objective nor the subjective world, but, having features of each, it deals with their correlation."

⁸¹ You will find this conception expressed with all possible candour in the introduction with which Mme. de Cajanello prefaces her *Biography of Sonia Kowalewsky*. This woman of the world exclaims: "It is not objective truth that I seek in the

turum, mentioned above, has also been extended to criticism. A sort of pathetic criticism, hitherto unknown, has been set up, to the great joy of a large public; here are a few examples: "That expression, these inflections, that strength of will" (of a hero of Ch.-L. Philippe), "ah! it is not merely a character in a novel that he presents to us, but a real personality, etc." Or again: "Words! that I cannot leave, that I cannot let escape as long as you still have something to say to me. We shall not leave thee, Lord, until thou hast blessed us."⁸² At the same time, there is the demand that criticism deal only with the individual, ruling out all idea of classification according to spirit, all *genre*, all relationship, all law; (Sainte-Beuve's method, at least in the *Lundis*, whom they want to make out more individualistic even than he is); furthermore, that criticism confine itself to impressions, intuitions, repudiating all attempt at generalization, or systematization; in short, everything that might be so unfortunate as to give rise

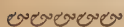


history of Sonia. What, by the way, does objective truth mean when applied to the exposition of the soul?" The author then expresses her determination to describe the soul in question, "from her own particular point of view," and quite evidently does not conceive the possibility of criticism made in any other spirit.

⁸² *Nouvelle Revue Française*, *passim*.

to thought. You still remember, during the famous tilt between Anatole France and Brunetière on the nature of criticism, how ardently they adopted the doctrine of the former, how resolute was their determination to ignore the fact that Ariel's dazzling flights in this case left Caliban master of the situation, and that it is possible to conceive of literary criticism worthy of the name that resembles something other than the delightful rustle of a flock of impressions flying through space.⁸³

Note also the desire — implied in their cult of Sainte-Beuve — that criticism bring to their attention psychological phases rather than literary phenomena, souls rather than works. It is assuredly one of the elements of his success that this illustrious critic devotes so many of his essays to authors whose literary importance is negligible (women, magistrates, courtiers, soldiers) but whose writings provide an opportunity of portraying a soul; that he delights to concentrate on the secondary



⁸³ Is there any need to remark that Anatole France's criticism is by no means impressionistic, but is full of just these generalizations, these co-ordinations, from which he so ardently desires to appear exempt? Nothing could be more significant than the desperate efforts of our modern masters — Renan, France, Lemaître — to make us believe that they are innocent of all organized ideas.

products of the masters — notes, first drafts, intimate letters — rather than on their important works, which are admittedly less expressive of their psychology. This cult of our contemporaries for Sainte-Beuve has its counterpart in their hatred of Taine, since he, on the other hand, uses the psychology of the writer to explain his work, and “restores to the position of first importance for critical study literary works properly conceived as works of art, works which owe their existence to their authors, but which have detached themselves from their authors, and, if they do not live, at least exist, of themselves, and have their unity and their personal identity.”⁸⁴

We cannot too strongly denounce our contemporaries

⁸⁴ Lanson, *Hommes et Livres*, preface, and *L'Histoire Littéraire et la Sociologie*. (*Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, July, 1904.) There is a criticism of Sainte-Beuve's method, from the same point of view, by Othenin d'Haussonville (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, Feb. 1875): “There is a literary beauty, to some extent impersonal and quite apart from the author himself and from his intention, a beauty which has its own *raison d'être* and its own laws, which criticism must take into account. And if criticism considers this task beneath it, and relegates it to the rhetoricians, and to the Quintilians, as Sainte-Beuve contemptuously terms them, then we would say that rhetoric has its elements of good, and the Quintilians are not to be despised.”

raries' insistence on considering works of art according to their relations to the author, and not on their own merits. It is one of the clearest proofs of their eagerness to experience emotional rather than intellectual enjoyment from the product of the mind. Suppose, for instance, they come across this thought: "When a woman ceases to love a man, she forgets everything — even the favours she bestowed upon him." Do you imagine they will make any effort to appreciate the value of the remark, to discuss its scope, or to admire its felicity of expression? Not at all; they will want to know what circumstances in La Bruyère's life suggested the line, whether he loved and was jilted, whether he suffered. . . . But this desire is most significant in the case of works that are exclusively expressive of ideas, and survive only as such, like those of Montesquieu, Guizot, or Auguste Comte. Do not talk to our moderns of these ideas for their own sake, of their effect as ideas, detached from their author, or seek to show them the developments through which they continue to give us food for thought at the present day. To them all that is idle talk. But tell them that Rousseau came upon his doctrine of man's natural goodness, on the Vincennes road, on his way to see Diderot, while in a state of breathless excitement, or that one of Auguste Comte's ideas that changed the

course of philosophic thought was due to his relations with Clotilde de Vaux — this they hail with delight, as real criticism.

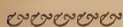
Is it not a sign of the same interest in personality rather than ideas, when criticism is used to bring out the exact thought that occupied a philosopher's mind rather than to study the distortions it has suffered in its dissemination throughout the world?

Respect, of course, demands that we clear the names of our great writers of the excesses that popular enthusiasm ascribes to them. But is it not these thoughts betrayed thus by popular enthusiasm that constitute the true history of men's ideas? Does not Brunetière show profound sensibility to the social history of ideas when he says: "It is interesting to know what Descartes thought, but it is still more interesting to know what his contemporaries thought he thought." Is it really important to know that Christ condemned property, that Spinoza admits authoritative government, that Newton did not believe in the concrete reality of universal attraction, that Darwin never declared himself an atheist, since the measure of the adoption of their philosophy by humanity is in accordance with their having been construed as saying the opposite? As a matter of fact, a real taste for ideas is so rare, even in the professional thinkers, that a history of ideas con-

sidered as such and deliberately divorced from its author's personality has never seriously been attempted. *The Philosophy of the Greeks* by Edward Zeller is still almost unique as a work of which one can say (not, by the way, without a hint of reproach) that "ideas are presented, freed from the human element and from everything that might connect the idea with an individual soul, sensibility or conscience."⁸⁵

This would assure the German critic of being thoroughly unpopular with our aesthetes. On the other hand, it is regrettable that their patriotism prevents them from adopting H.-S. Chamberlain, who holds that philosophic criticism should be entirely biographical! (See his Study on Kant.)

Likewise, they demand that history, too, shall consist principally in living the heart-beats of the past. They join the German master in proclaiming: "All history as it is lived and suffered personally: thus alone can it be true. . . . No descriptions, every problem translated in terms of feeling and even of passion."⁸⁶ Péguy and his satellites have insisted that real historians

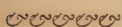


⁸⁵ Alfred Croiset, preface to the French translation of the *Greek Thinkers* by Gomperz.

⁸⁶ Quoted with enthusiasm in an article entitled: "*Pascal and Nietzsche*" (*Revue Germanique*, Jan. 1914).

shall be chroniclers who live their epoch without trying to understand it. They have cried shame on the historian who strove to be impartial and to follow the ancient precept of not being a citizen; in the case of another German (Treitschke) they requested that he desist from this anaemic objectivity, strongly antagonistic to real historic feeling, that he write with wrath and indignation. They insist on being aware of the historian's soul as well as those of his characters. Here again, subjectivity, till now deplored as a necessary evil that one tried to eliminate, is being honoured, sought after, and cultivated. They are capable of giving Joinville credit as a historian for having left us uncertain whether he was writing his own life or that of his hero; for, according to the charming expression of a contemporary, in it he is "skilfully enshrined, like the sculptor Phidias in the folds of Minerva's robe." Erudition is despised, not, after the fashion of Huet, La Bruyère, and Montesquieu, because it tends to rule out general ideas, but because it arrests the movement, and prevents us from grasping life! So here again, we have the repudiation of the general point of view, of co-ordination, of systematization, of everything that might inculcate thought. Our aesthetes would exchange all general ideas on the Carolingian policy or on the meaning of the feudal system, for the assurance

that Jean-sans-Terre has passed this way. These are the essentials of history to men whose ancestors abandoned La Barre and Massuet because of their "lack of the philosopher's spirit" (Mme. du Châtelet), who issued within a few years twenty editions of the *Essai sur les Mœurs*, who abused a writer of memoirs for introducing useless trifles and a historian for making statements without quoting his authorities.⁸⁷



⁸⁷ Bussy, letter of Aug. 16th, 1671 to Mme. de Scudéry regarding the *Mémoires* of Bassompierre, and particularly (vol. III p. 470) *Réponse au Père Bouhours qui lui envoie son histoire de Pierre d'Aubusson, grandmaître de Rhodes*. Here we read, for instance: "This is so extraordinary (that a volunteer private helped to win a battle) that it would have been worth while to quote the source from which it was taken." And again: "I should have liked him to mention the name of the author who wrote this reply ('you will one day reap the benefits of my toil'); for such prophecies, to be believed, should be backed by high authorities." And, regarding the phrase: "Mahomet struck the Sultaness a blow with his scimitar and stretched her dead at their feet," he says: "All he needed to say was: 'Mahomet killed the Sultaness in their presence.' It interests no one to know that it was by a scimitar that she was killed." See also the *Réflexions sur les Historiens Français et sur les qualités nécessaires pour composer l'histoire* by D'Argenson (1755); this man of the world flays "compilers of ill-digested memoirs" and "diffuse biographers"; he demands from the historian "exact and erudite criticism" etc. However, let us

Here again, Sainte-Beuve is a patron (a little slighted, however) of our aesthetes. Talking of Saint-Simon he makes formal declaration of the superiority of "lived" history over that other which "is based on the documents and the machinery of State, diplomatic papers, ambassadors' correspondence, original documents of all kinds"; he denounces the latter's attempts to re-constitute the past by means of "so-called positive evidence." Again one can see in these words this impressionistic writer's impatience with any attempt to use science or philosophy in connection, at least, with psychological facts. Sainte-Beuve is the incarnation of the intellectual attitude which would give Kant plus Spinoza to possess the memoirs of Aspasia — a significant mark of the modern aesthetic.

There is the desire, too, that even science shall be



not generalize too much. In all time there has been a large proportion of society people who desired that history be emotional. P. L. Courier ridicules serious history; Mme. de Sévigné's granddaughter, Mme. de Simiane, demands that history be never dry; Mérimée prefers the method of anecdote. It is true that all this has never before been formally set up as doctrine, as it is to-day. The changes in the aesthetic of history may be traced through the centuries by considering the evolution of society's opinion on Quintus Curtius. (To be found in Dosson's *Quinte-Curce*.)

emotionally effective by providing rapid and unexpected glimpses, intuitions, and furthermore, that these shall not be offered simply for their value in preliminary investigation, as all the philosophers from Descartes to Duhem have used them, but that science shall consist entirely of such and shall rule out all organized ideas, together with reasoning and discursive thought. Again, the characteristic horror of the mathematical, systematic mind (so curious when applied to science) and their cult for the subtle mind.⁸⁸ They have more or less frankly repudiated any method in research, any *a priori* conception which might confine experiment within certain channels. The tentative method appeals to them because, according to the profound opinion of Bacon, it astonishes men more than it enlightens them. The philosopher, too, must transplant his soul into that of his subject, must think biologically of biological facts and religiously of religious facts.



⁸⁸ We have shown elsewhere (*Les Sentiments de Critias*, p. 139) the distortions to which Pascal's thought has been subjected. This aversion from the systematic mind has always been more or less openly included in society's *Credo* (remember the Chevalier de Méré); it is a form of their horror of the virile mind of which we spoke above. And of course they never refer to the systematic mind except in instances where it has failed, or to the subtle mind except when it has been successful.

Then all at once they discover that science provides only a point of view of things, only the arbitrary conception which the intelligence forms, that it substitutes the symbol for the reality and proceeds by concepts, that it congeals reality! Henceforth it must present the things themselves in their reality, in their fluidity; also that the science — of life, at least — (which is the only science they respect) shall deal with phenomena, not according to their mutual resemblances, but according to their disparities, in their non-recurrence — in the sense of the poet's words:

“We shall never again have our soul of to-night.”

In a word, what they seek is that extraordinary and evidently emotionally effective thing: a science without abstraction, a science of the individual, we might say or every minute of the individual. Please take note that with all this they have never said: “We only want to feel, we have no use for science.” What they say is: “We are the true science.”⁸⁹

Finally, the philosopher, too, must be both under the influence of, and productive of, emotion, and cease to



⁸⁹ In *Sur le Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 215, we have given a striking instance of our contemporaries' attempt, in giving themselves up to pure feeling, to make out that it is science.

be a thinker. They hail as true forms of philosophy a jumble of intuitions thrown together, pell-mell, without coherence, without judgment (Nietzsche, Péguy, Sorel), actions in words, so to speak, at times very effective —

“brilliant as a flash that shall endure for ever ”

These are admittedly used for the purpose of representing the developments of the action and not of the thought (contempt for logic, acceptance of the contradictory, etc.). They have laid down that philosophic work is of value only for the *art* that it reveals (Boutroux),⁹⁰ for the talent it inspires (Renan), for the “ results it indirectly calls forth ” (Péguy, Sorel), for its combative powers (Péguy), never for its intellectual content.⁹¹



⁹⁰ See our *Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 154 and fol.

⁹¹ These demands are expressed with all possible clarity by Péguy (*Note sur M. Bergson et La Philosophie Bergsonienne*); Here we read that philosophies are great according as they “ produce commotion ” or “ put up a good fight,” that anyone who tries to find out whether these philosophies are right or wrong simply proves that he “ does not know what he is talking about.” We have before us numerous letters from laymen, notably one from M. Romain Rolland, in which Péguy is sincerely congratulated on this conception of philosophy. (See Note K at end of volume.)

They make the statement that strict reasoning has nothing to do with this subject,⁹² that artistic style⁹³ or better still, metaphoric style⁹⁴ is the only requirement. They exact from philosophy, too, that it shall present the moving spectacle of an entirely subjective lyric activity (this is the age of *pan-lyricism*); that the philosopher who deals with life shall become life, and that his method shall be that of creating a mystic union between himself and his evolving principle; and finally, as in the case of history and criticism, that philosophy shall ignore general points of view, and recognize only the individual; that it shall portray not a mental conception of things but things themselves, not a conception of love, but love itself, not a conception of courage but courage itself. This latter characteristic, this hatred of philosophy in so far as it gives only present views on our beloved passions, is not new to our drawing-rooms. Three centuries ago a guest of Ninon spoke of an author of an essay on psychological analysis in terms that are suggestive of a devotee of Bergson: "What! Is this all that you can say of passion, of the stirring impulse of life! It is but a narrow space in



⁹² J. Florence, see above.

⁹³ Rageot, see above.

⁹⁴ E. Gilson, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1916.

which you have confined a vast sea. Love is a thing of beauty and of fulness and your book makes of it a dried-up skeleton, with neither fulness nor colour.”⁹⁵ But Ninon’s guests, while requiring direct contact with things themselves, do not seem to have considered that this constituted philosophy. The formal establishment of a philosophy based on pathos is a triumph peculiar only to our time.



⁹⁵ *La Coquette Vengée*, attributed to Ninon de Lenclos.

❧ *Part Two* ❧

Whence arises this frantic effort of present French society to force intellectual work into the realm of emotion?

Some people have suggested that there is one and only one explanation: the presence of the Jews. A tempting theory, undoubtedly. If we may draw a distinction — perhaps too subtle for men who write for the people — we would point out that there are two kinds of Jews: the severe, moralistic Jew, and the Jew who is always greedy for sensation — speaking symbolically, the Hebrew and the Carthaginian, Jehovah and Belphégor, Spinoza and Bergson. We cannot deny the Carthaginians' passion for literature creative of emotion, their cult of the theatre and of the comedian, their thirst (Alexandrian) for the indistinct, for the non-defined, for the mysterious, for the confusion of subject and object; nor can we help noticing the coincidence of the present French aesthetic, as we have just portrayed it, with the enormous part the Jews have had in its development during the past few years. Certain races seem to have an inherent rage for sensation which in other races develops only in the course of years, just as certain species of animals have by nature a virus which others have to acquire. This explanation, however, seems to us highly unsatisfactory. First, because there is nothing to

show that groups of society unfrequented by Jews are less inclined to the spasmodic æsthetic we are discussing, or to prove that, for instance, 'anti-Semitic' or even 'non-Semitic' groups are less in love with mystery and infinitude, less enthusiastic about the comedian, about the drama of love or of *Méligandes*. And even more, because this, like all explanations that attempt to account for the diseased state of an organism by pointing out the presence of an external force, loses sight of the fundamental cause: the *receptivity* of the organism, the degenerate condition into which it must have lapsed before the external force could do its work. I am willing to admit that present-day French society may have been precipitated into Alexandrianism by the influence of the Jews, like the contemporaries of Philetas of Cos, and those of Juvenal. But society was already Alexandrian. The same cause would not have produced the same effect two centuries earlier. A crystal will not precipitate a fluid mass unless that mass is of the same nature as itself. The influence of the Jews in the twentieth century leads us straight back to the question: why was society susceptible to this influence? Why was it Alexandrian?

First of all we may ask ourselves whether society's Alexandrianism may not simply be the result of age; whether any society may not in the course of two or

three centuries become Alexandrian through the sheer fact of the passage of time and nothing else; whether the increasingly intensive and exclusive inquiry into the emotional potentialities of intellectual work may not be the natural process by which a society grows old, just as hairs turn white or arteries harden. It is striking to note that in every country in which there have been societies in this sense — in Greece, in Rome, in Italy, in France — the same symptoms of age have appeared, and that the nations on whom time has not so obviously produced such an effect — Germany and Great Britain — are those in which, properly speaking, this kind of society can hardly be said to have existed.

We might even find *a priori* proof of this fact. What, really, is good society? A group of privileged persons whose refined and leisured existence has created a particular need for feeling. What do they seek in works of the intellect? Another opportunity to satisfy this need. In other words, Alexandrianism is implied in the definition of a good society and of its aesthetic aspirations, just as decomposition is implied in the definition of chemical combination, or authority in that of government, or intolerance in that of faith. Held in restraint during the golden or classic age by firmness and severity (the preponderance of which constitutes youth itself), the malady breaks out when, as the organism grows old, its

muscular tissue relaxes and society in the ordinary process of ageing gives way, unresisting, to its own nature. But let us not take too seriously this parallel between the development of societies and that of the individual.

Another important clue to our society's aesthetic is, we consider, the lowered standard of culture; and in particular the disappearance from the atmosphere in which its members grow up, of the influence of theological education and the cult of classic literature. We say atmosphere, because we do not imagine for a moment that society people of former times really applied themselves to theology like a Trévillé, or were as learned in the humanities as a Sévigné, but that these disciplinary influences were in the air they breathed and impregnated them as might a climate (which is manifest in the least important of their writings); and it is the disappearance of this condition on which we wish to lay stress.¹



¹ This disappearance is so complete that the director of a repertory theatre told us recently that he hesitated to revive *La Belle Hélène* as he was sure that most of the allusions to the Trojan legend would be entirely lost on the younger generation. The discontinuance of the study of logic might be added to the causes of the lowered standard of culture mentioned above. "This," says a thinker (Renouvier, *Logique*, Vol. II, p. 126) "has reached such a point in France that were it not

The inter-relation between the dropping of these disciplinary studies (especially Latin) and the disappearance of all intellectual restraint, of all sense of the distinct and sharply-defined, of plastic sensibility, will be admitted even by those who despise these latter qualities.

We would suggest that besides numerous other causes (the development of sport, reading almost entirely limited to newspapers, etc.) the lowered standard of culture may be due to the entrance into French society of people of a different class, whose minds are in a state of nature (parvenus of trade, industry and finance, etc.)² It seems to us that generally speaking these sociological changes are not given their due importance in accounting for the decadence of the taste of society. We must realize that it is not simply that a class is changing its standards of value, but that because of political developments new arrivals, lacking culture, become members of that class, bringing



for the study of mathematics and, to some extent, of law, there would be but few cultured people who could manage the reciprocal syllogism or avoid larding their conversations with gross errors of logic." Written in 1860. What would the writer say to-day?

² How much more true since the war, with the *nouveaux riches*!

with them their own standards of value; French society's taste for the romantic, for instance, is not caused only by the descendants of Caylus and Rabutin deliberately changing their sensibility, it is the result of the invasion of good society's ranks by a multitude of parvenus bringing with them their own aesthetic. Just as it could be said that the triumph of Christianity is the substitution of the morality of the slave for that of the master, so the triumph of romanticism is the substitution in good society of the aesthetic of the savage for that of civilized man.

To convince ourselves that romanticism is the aesthetic of man in a state of nature we need only observe the literary tastes of our maid-servants and our janitors. We are aware that certain of our contemporaries contest this in the case of the French; according to them the Frenchman is a natural born classicist, a lover of order in art, of reason, of restraint, and would never have fallen away from these virtues except through foreign influences. Shall we remind ourselves of what the Frenchman was before he came under the influence of classic literature — his formless poems of twelve thousand lines, his delight in truculence and miracle-workings? However, patriotism must be respected in all its forms!

Another condition which seems to us to explain the

aesthetic of modern society and particularly their cult of *life*, their hatred of criticism (also their moral attitude) is that they are infinitely more taken up with the business of life itself than were their predecessors. Most of them are working. Quite a number of the so-called 'quality' (this is particularly true since the war) are to-day unable to maintain their former style of living except by work, or, if not actually working, by spending their energy in arranging business deals, and inventing intrigues and tricks of all kinds. This induces contempt for any activity which has no material end in view. A day will come when the man whose sole aim is exact definition and exact description will be looked upon by good society as a child on whom one smiles indulgently. Add to this the constant uneasiness caused by the insecurity of property, of social rank, of all that means position; the continuous state of tension resulting from keener competition in every walk of life, the increasing difficulties in acquiring position and honour, the struggle to provide for children, to arrive, to make a hit, to dazzle. Notice, too, how much we are taken up with love, by reason of the increased temptations and facilities offered by divorce, by the disappearance of religious scruples, and by the setting back of the age formerly considered requisite for love (to-day sexagenarians frequently start out on this career).

And, finally, notice that they are now at war — and what a war! It cannot be denied that there is an enormous increase in our aristocratic classes of indulgence in life and passion. Does not that explain their detestation of the man who judges passion? Is it not exasperating, when we thrill, and suffer, and weep, and love, to see people calmly classifying and defining these our emotions, like those monsters, mentioned by Renan, who while our planet is being torn asunder and humanity about to perish, are solely occupied in reforming their conception of the cosmos? When Napoleon's men, tormented by thirst in the deserts of Egypt, and thinking that at last they had reached the end of their suffering, found only a horrible waste of sand at the place where they imagined they had seen a sheet of water, I am inclined to think they must have been somewhat annoyed with the philosopher, who, standing calmly at their side, began formulating the theory of the mirage!

This intensification of life is taking place also in the world of letters, with very grave results. Apart from the fact that men of letters now go to war, their position, despite themselves, is daily being lowered from that of intellectuals to laymen. "Most of us have a job," a correspondent of Agathon tells us. More and more they are a prey to the cares of a household, of a double household,

of the head of a family, and to the need of providing money for the necessities and indeed the luxuries for which their position as professional men creates increasing need. This increasing secularization of men of letters seems to us to explain to some extent the quality of contemporary literature: more and more lacking in form and literary standard, more and more human, living, moralistic. The fact that our writers are no longer pensioned has its effect, not only on the time and care they devote to their work, but also on the conception of life which they express. There is some significance in the relationship brought out by the German philosopher between the quality of any literature and the economic condition of those who created it. And, most serious of all, this intensification of life has reached even the philosophers. They, too, to-day are married, have children, are in the midst of life. Once more, the word has been made flesh. We have spoken elsewhere³ of the disasters resulting from the secularization of the philosophers, of the degeneration of philosophy into morals, of its falling away from the study of nature and from disinterested speculative research. Philosophy, also, to be well served, requires celibacy from its priests.



³ *Sur le Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 207.

Still another cause of our contemporaries' æsthetic, particularly of their desire to experience sensation from the products of the mind, is the enormous development of luxury in modern life—to be more exact, of all that tends to caress the senses of our wealthy classes. And it is especially in respect of this caressing quality that one may say that luxury has progressed during the past three centuries. In respect of magnificence, it has rather retrogressed. From the point of view of splendour, of the number of servants, of the luxury of the table, of the importance of keeping up a certain style, who could compare the grandee of to-day with a Mazarin, a Fouquet, or a Seignelay? Here again we might characterize the luxury of those days as plastic, that of our contemporaries as musical. And of this their æsthetic is a direct consequence. One day, being summoned by a lady of fashion who wished to give me some order, I awaited her in her drawing-room. Looking round the room, I noticed that everything—the material and colour of the hangings, the carpet, the cushions, the ornaments, the shape of the furniture, the lighting system—had been arranged with a view to flattering the senses, and avoiding any impression of severity. It occurred to me to look at the books. Again I had a definite feeling that these—novels of passion, sickly poems, vapid philosophies—

were a direct development in the realm of literature of the caressing quality I had noted on the walls and sofas. It was obviously impossible, in this shrine to relaxation, that anyone should wish to crack one of La Bruyère's nuts.

Finally, one of the crucial reasons, we believe, why present French society's aesthetic is as we describe it, lies in the fact *that it is entirely created by women*. Many an author will tell you that he writes only for women, that only women read any more. You can prove this for yourself: suppose you discuss art, literary doctrines or aesthetics in the drawing-room after dinner. With the exception of a few youngsters and the professionals, not a man will take part in the conversation. The man of the world, the lover and quasi-director of *belles-lettres*, such as Luynes, Liancourt, Saint-Evremond, Bussy, Lamoignon, Hénault, is really a lost species. One may say that to-day, since men of the world are killing themselves with work and have neither time nor taste for leisured activities, the leadership in things mental and spiritual is in good society monopolized entirely by women. True, this monopoly has always existed in French society, though in a lesser degree, and is therefore not in itself a sufficient explanation of the phenomenon we are discussing. In the seventeenth century, too, the aesthetic of good society was mostly

created by women, and yet it was a very different aesthetic.⁴ The difference is that the women of that time had a respect for the masculine type of mind, and valued their own in proportion as they approached it, whereas to-day (and this is a turning-point in the history of culture) they openly despise the mental structure of man and have set up a violent cult of the feminine soul. The former exalted their sex because they maintained it is as capable of reasoning as the other; the latter, because it is free from reasoning, and is simply passion, instinct, intuition. One may expect some difference in result! ⁵

It must be noted that these conditions of French society, which we believe to be the cause of its aesthetic, are deeply ingrained, and are little likely to pass away. No one, surely, supposes, particularly after this war, that society will become more cultured, less taken up with life, or that men are going to have leisure, or women cease to impose their tastes? We wish to em-



⁴ "It is only the women who read, who appreciate, and who buy," said Père Mambrun in 1652 (quoted by F. Brunot, *Histoire de la Langue Française*, IV, p. 5). And Voltaire, a hundred years later (*Preface pour Sertorius*): "Who goes to the theatre to-day? A certain number of young men and young women."

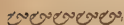
⁵ See Note L at end of volume.

phasize that in our opinion, though there are some who disagree, this aesthetic is not just a fashion, but on the contrary is destined to last and even to grow stronger; saying which, we do not deny the probability of a violent return to classicism. This, however, *will* be a fashion, and indeed will be a particular form, as we have seen, of the desire for the excessive.

❧ *Part Three* ❧

III

With these æsthetic tendencies — which we consider permanent — prevailing in good French society, what, may one suppose, is the future of art? The conclusion is that the gulf will continue to widen between society and the intellectualistic writer, by which we mean either the writer who presents ideas, like Montesquieu, Taine or Renan, or who, like Racine or La Fayette allows intelligence and judgment to predominate over sentiment in the composition of his work; again, though heretofore less pronounced, this gulf has always existed, for, as we know, the worldly success of these masters has never been overwhelming.¹ It must be clearly understood that we do not mean that such a writer will have no reading public; on the contrary, we believe that with the increasing circulation of books and the extended opportunities of communication between citizens, he will have and already has a larger public than heretofore; but it will consist of professional intellectuals, of the recluse with a curiosity for the things of the spirit, and not of men and women of the world. And perhaps we are justified in fearing that by renouncing all hope of arresting the attention of this class he may renounce also all effort to acquire



¹ Except in the case of Taine, but this for political reasons.

the charm and lightness of form which, in the matter of ideas, is a condition of art. Indeed, with the future of social life and culture as we see it, we might even wonder whether this type of brain, artistic and at the same time intellectual, will ever make its appearance again; whether there will not always be the two types, forever incompatible and glaring furiously at each other — on the one hand the savant, completely unsecular, and on the other the layman, firmly opposed to all discipline of the intelligence; whether the synthesis, in one man, of the scientific mind of the Italian renaissance, and the artistic mind of Greece, that marvellous combination, that blaze of glory which was kindled in our seventeenth century literature and whose last rays were Taine, Renan and France, has not been forever extinguished in our time:

“Suns that have set forever on our horizon!”

As for society itself, we may foretell that this thirst for emotion through art, becoming in turn itself a cause, will grow more ardent, and the application with which they seek to satisfy it more and more eager and effective. We see before us the day when good French society will repudiate even the slight support they now accord to ideas and organization in art, when their only enthusiasm will be for the comedian's gestures or

the impressions of women and children, the thunders of lyric poetry and the ecstatic ravings of the fanatic. All this, however, need cause but slight anxiety to the country at large, whatever the malcontents may say, when we realize how little this intellectual anaesthesia has hampered — perhaps it has even helped — the members of that society in fulfilling their duty in the present emergency; how a nation — despite the hackneyed phrases — can very well prosper in strength and in riches — as witness the Roman Empire — under the direction of a class more and more deprived of intellectual poise; and how, finally, and most important, that same society is daily relinquishing its leadership in favour of other classes, not less unintellectual, but differently so.

Note A &

The most highly-praised drama of the age of rationalism was *Timocrate*.

It is a known fact that Thomas Corneille's *Timocrate* is written around a somewhat touching theme. Timocrate, the amorous suitor of a foreign princess is under orders to besiege her house, for political reasons, and employs himself during the night in destroying the fortifications which his own army has built during the day. The play ran for eighty consecutive nights. *Andromaque*, Racine's greatest success, was played only twenty-seven times.

We must rid ourselves entirely of the belief, which a certain political party has fostered for its own advantage, that the Sévignés, the La Fayettees, the La Rochefoucaulds, and the Bussys are representative of the aesthetic of society in their day. Nothing could be more false. People of discrimination were the exception. Most of the masterpieces of our classic writers were received by the general public with complete indifference; Bossuet lived to see only three editions of his *Discours sur L'Histoire Universelle*. The plays of Racine had no sale, a reprint being made of the title page to give the impression that the edition was sold out; again, in 1750, speaking of a revival of *Bérénice* (Racine) the society magazine (*Le Mercure*) remarks that "through the

talent of the actors the play seemed more interesting than it really was"; while in the same year, *Cénie*, a sentimental work by Mme. de Graffigny was much admired and had a great success. It was more than a century after its publication that *L'Art Poétique* was honoured by a separate edition; till then it was simply listed among the works of Boileau. The first editions of Mme. de Sévigné's letters nearly ruined the publishers. And so forth. To quote Mme. de Caylus: "In court circles the attempts of the few to employ their leisure in analyzing an opinion or in the discussion of intellectual works met only with derision."

Nor have we any right to presume that good taste was general among the lower classes of the golden age. P.-L. Courier may be right in saying that in the time of Louis XIV a chambermaid knew more about the art of writing than a modern academy. That may be accounted for by the habits of speech of that period. But we may be fairly sure that *Les Provinciales* (Pascal) and *La Princesse de Clèves* (Mme. de la Fayette) were not among her favourite books.

Note B ❧

"That artistic expression should be a natural prolongation of the artist's emotion."

The author of *L'Origine de la Tragédie* is a brilliant, though possibly unconscious, exponent of this thesis: to him it seems quite fitting that the pursuit of the god Bacchus should be transformed by a natural process of continuity into a chorus of Aeschylus. It is a thesis dear to the hearts of all mystics. "A person of my acquaintance," says St. Theresa, "who knows nothing about the writing of verse, has quite spontaneously composed lines full of vivid, salient feeling. They were an emanation of the heart rather than of the mind." One cannot but think of those scholars (Fauriel, Ampère, Michelet, Paulin Pâris), who will have it that the great epics, such as the *Iliad*, the *Chanson de Roland* are the "explosions of national, collective sentiments" which, we are to believe, one fine day set out to express themselves spontaneously in alexandrines and decasyllables. Michelet is particularly ebullient: "The man, Homer," he exclaims (*Discours sur Vico*), "will perish . . . or let us rather say he will develop into a collective being, a school of poetry, of rhapsodists, of homerids; nay more than that, a school — a people, the Greek people whose rhapsodists have but repeated and modulated the poetic tradition." And again, "One might object: suppose a whole people had the gift of poetry, how could they invent those tricks of style, those episodes, those happily-turned phrases, that poetic

rhythm? . . . How rather could they fail to discover them and weed out all that was irrelevant? As for musical and poetic rhythm, it is natural to man; the stammerer attempts to speak in song; under the influence of passion, the voice changes and acquires a lilt. . . ."

As a matter of fact, in Michelet's case this doctrine arises from the religion of democracy rather than from that of sentiment, and from that desire (common to all men in 1848: Proudhon, V. Hugo, Ed. Quinet) to explain the great works of history as collective movements independent of individuals. (See, for example, his insistence that August 10th, 1792 and the days of July 1830 were not brought about by any single man.)

Note C

On the Confusion of Genres

In speaking of our contemporaries' delight in the indistinct we shall not mention their tendency to confuse genres, not because this tendency is lacking in them, but because they are no longer able even to conceive that genres were ever *not* confused. Here is one among the possible explanations of this tendency which, it seems to us, does credit to the ingenuity of the author as well as to his social attitudes:

These are the
days of the
religion
of D.
Chopin.

"In our time it is thought that genres lose their value by being differentiated,¹ and that tones that are sustained are weakened as a result. There is, for instance, the opinion that by differentiating genres France deprived herself for nearly two centuries of the wisdom, the naïveté and the energy of Montaigne. One might, however, reply that Montaigne's qualities, distributed among La Bruyère, La Fontaine, Montesquieu and others, have each acquired a development which they might not have reached through him. . . .

"I have not the presumption nor the temerity to take a stand against the return of literature toward the mixing of genres, of tones and of styles, which has been looked upon ever since the *Précieuses*² as barbarism.

"To-day the separation of genres in literary works has become almost impossible, and can no longer be a rule in literary art, or at least as absolute a rule as it was before the Revolution. The reason for this change is that the literature of a nation is the expression of its customs.



¹ Written in 1835. A discussion of that time on the question of genres can be found in the preface to *Odes et Ballades* (1826) Hugo.

² In the author's opinion, the *Précieuses* constitute the perfection of French Society. One of the main purposes of his work is to differentiate them from the *Précieuses ridicules*.

"Why were genres differentiated at the birth of our literature, under Louis XIII and Louis XIV? Why are they confused to-day?"

"Because under these two kings, France was governed by habits of respect which to-day are irretrievably lost.

"The gradations of rank, from the king down, had produced gradations of respect in the language of the upper classes, which had to be studied and which in turn produced tact and discernment, the latter becoming eventually a criterion of good breeding. . . ."

The author demonstrates the gradual disappearance of respect and concludes:

"With respect lacking, everything shows an effect of slackness which makes itself felt in tone and in language." (Roederer: *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la société polie en France*, p. 179 and fol.)



We should like to quote, from another source, an interesting protest against art "without divisions."

"In nature all is in all; intersection is everywhere and there is incessant interchange and metamorphosis. But *only the mind attuned to the infinite can really look upon nature from this point of view of infinite diversity*; in order that finite minds should appreciate

nature they must be given the faculty of imposing limits which really do not exist, of introducing divisions and of guiding their attention in accordance with their own good pleasure.

"We are continually availing ourselves of this faculty; *without it life would be impossible for us; we should be a prey to the impression of each passing moment; we should live in a constant state of dreaming and not even know that we were dreaming.*

"The value of art lies in the help it affords us to introduce divisions in the realm of beauty and to fix our attention. Art actually does isolate whatever our mind isolates or seeks to isolate in nature, whether it be one single object or a collection of different objects; it holds the object or collection of objects in focus before our eyes, illuminating them and concentrating them just in so far as is necessary for the feeling they ought to produce.

"If, while we are watching an interesting and touching incident, another incident which does not interest us forces itself upon our attention we try by every means to escape from the distraction of the latter. We go through a process of abstractions. So that if we find in art what we were seeking to derive from nature we cannot fail to meet with disappointment." (Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*: 44th Lesson. There fol-

lows a wisely drawn exception in favour of a certain fusion of tragedy and comedy.)

It will be seen that our present-day theories of an art which shall represent reality in its "indivisible totality" are not new. Isn't it rather cruel to see good sense rise up in all its dignity to combat them — in the person of a German?

Note D ❧

"The sensation caused by music is diffuse and scattered. . . ."

We might point out that music, hailed as it is unanimously as productive of the emotion of love, does not really excite sexual passion, the tension of love, but rather a vague and agreeably indefinite condition, a state of voluptuousness rather than desire (we are speaking here of pure music, not the intellectual pattern which imagination weaves around it).

Note E ❧

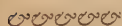
Further reasons why the sensations of sight are infinitely less emotionally effective than those of hearing, smell and taste.

1st. The sensations of sight are naturally inseparable

from the idea of the object which arouses them; they are sensation *mixed with an intellectual condition*, (the latter sometimes usurping almost all the field); they come under the heading of *clear* sensibility.³ Sensations of hearing, etc., during which we easily put aside the object which arouses them, constitute *pure sensation*, exempt, in so far as any conscious state can be, from any intellectual element;⁴ these come under the heading of *clouded* sensibility.

2nd. Sensations of sight impose upon the subject the idea of something *outside of himself* (judgment of exteriority); they make him aware of the limitation, the finite state of his being; sensations of hearing, etc., seem to him to come from *inside*; to him it seems as though by his own effort he were increasing the scope of his being; they make him aware of the infinitude of his ego.

One may also say, in this connection, that sensations of sight impose upon the subject the idea of dis-



³ "Sight is eminently associated with clear consciousness." Ravaisson, *De L'Habitude* pp. 23, 35.

⁴ Fénelon seems to have clearly grasped that music fails in exact proportion as it lacks intellectuality. "Harmony which simply flatters the ear is merely an amusement for weak and lazy people. Music has value *only if the sound corresponds to the sense of the words.*" (*Lettre à l'Académie.*)

inction between himself and the object of his vision (*intellectual* state, principle of severity), whereas ~~sensations of hearing~~, etc., imply that feeling, so dear to our aesthetes, of a confusion between the subject and the object.

3rd. (and most important): The sensations of hearing — even more than those of smell and taste — cause vibration in a nervous system connected with a vital organism which lies deeper than that affected by sensations of sight. We know that certain sounds, certain odours, are able to produce profound bulbar and circulatory reactions, such as no visual object is able to arouse, at least as sensation apart from the intermediary of the idea.⁵

All these reasons of course are separate only in our analysis; in reality they work together.

Another reason why music is such a moving art is that it is in itself a human action. A cathedral, a picture, a statue, a book have been created by human agency; but a concert is a human act; we have before us a life which is spending itself, consuming itself; (for this reason the gramophone in which this is lack-



⁵ To be more exact, no visual object taken as a form; for certain colours can produce organic modifications. But how much less deep than the odor of musk or a chord of the ninth!

ing has so little power to move). In this respect love of music is related to love of the theatre. Furthermore, music is more moving simply because it implies the giving forth of the deepest in human beings, the most affecting form being that of singing, which is actually a human vibration, the wind instrument coming next in order, because it is the human breath, and last of all the strings, the zest with which our contemporaries clamour more and more for the preponderance of wind instruments in orchestras is a clear proof of the subtlety with which they seek emotion. (See, for example, the works of M. Laloy.)

Aristotle has already drawn attention to this greater emotional power of the wind instrument, realizing that it arose from the presence of the human breath. "Why," he asks, "is singing more agreeable when accompanied by the flute rather than by the lyre? Because the voice and the flute blend naturally, both coming through the breath, whereas the lyre, not coming through the breath, is less sensitive . . ." (*Sur La Musique*, Chap. 43.) The Greek philosopher however does not consider that this proves the superiority of the aulic chant.⁶



⁶ Aristotle seems to have realized also to what extent music owes its emotional power to the fact of its being an action:

Here is a passage which finely expresses this tenet that music gains in value the more nearly it approaches the human breath:

"The oldest, truest and finest instrument of music, the instrument to which our music owes its existence, is the human voice: in the natural course it was imitated by the wind instruments, which in turn were imitated by the strings; the symphonic combination of wind and strings was then imitated by the organ, and eventually replaced by the less cumbersome piano. We notice immediately that the primitive medium of music, as it passed from the human voice into the piano suffered a continuous lessening of expression. Orchestral instruments, having lost the power of vocal articulation, could still satisfactorily imitate the voice in its vividness and its infinite variety of expression; the pipes of the organ, however, could render only the duration of the tone, without its changing expression; and finally the piano could indicate the sound, leaving it to our imagination to divine the true body from which it might proceed. That is why we have in the piano an instrument which merely outlines music." (Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*.)



"Why," he says, with great insight, "have rhythms and lyric songs, which are vocal sounds, a moral significance unlike anything that affects the sense of taste, sight, or smell? Perhaps it is because they have movement just as actions do. So that activity is essentially moral, and productive of morality; on the other hand, what appeals to the taste or the sight does not produce the same effect." (Same, Chap. XXIX.)

The author of the following lines seems to have realized that the emotional power of the organ was due to the capacity to evoke the idea of the human voice and of collective singing, although his purpose was evidently to express other things:

“It seems to me that organs represent the regulated and ordered harmony of Heaven. The multiplicity of its pipes corresponds to the multiplicity of the saints, who sing the divine praises in accordance with their rank. The harmony is produced by means of the wind which is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit which, entering each saint according to his capacity, and causing the voice of each to ring forth in proportion to the scope of his power, expresses their God in the measure of his greatness and his grace. The wind is produced with the help of the organ-blower, corresponding to Jesus Christ, who, as a servant of the Church and of the saints, imbues them with the Holy Spirit and hence with his divine blessing. For, be it on earth or be it in Heaven, the Christ in us is the breath of the Spirit. The organist represents the Father who plays only in accordance with the idea he has conceived in his spirit, and who, having himself prepared and forged the instruments of his praise and glorification, according to his own good pleasure, uses them as he sees fit in the composition of divine harmonies.”

In a later passage, the author insists that the playing of the organ corresponds to collective singing, in Heaven at least:

“And perhaps it is for this reason (to associate the angels with our praises) that at High Mass the organ is played for the ‘Gloria in Excelsis’ but not for the ‘Credo’; because the ‘Gloria in Excelsis’ is the Hymn of the angels whom we join in their praises, whereas the ‘Credo’ is a profession of faith made only by mortals, and the organ, which represents the harmony of Heaven, should therefore remain silent.” (M. Olier, *Lettres Spirituelles*, XCIV, 1672).

Note F ❧

The Seventeenth Century and Local Colour ❧

The poets of the seventeenth century formally recognize local colour as a value in art — as element of truth, of course, not as source of emotion — and all of them sought to attain it. “As a dramatist,” says Corneille in his examination of *Horace*, “it would have been a crime for me to dress a Roman in French style.” Racine, in all his prefaces, strives to prove himself a truthful historian. (See also Boileau’s *Art Poétique*, III: “Study the customs of the period and of the country. . . .”) How could Taine have said that it is “through carelessness” that they “occasionally allowed colour to creep into the ideal, naked outline, which was all they sought to present”? The fol-

lowing, too, is surprising: In whom, of all people, do we find an attack on local colour? In the romanticist Chateaubriand! —

“In man there are two men; the man of his time and the man of all time; and it is the latter that a great artist seeks to portray. Perhaps to-day we place too high a value on reproducing the characteristics, even to the cast of feature, of each period. Possibly, in history as well as in the arts, we do represent the costumes, *the intimate life* (the italics are the author’s) and all the material characteristics of society more accurately than they used to do; but a Raphael, with its neglected background and its flagrant anachronisms surely relegates such perfections to a position of secondary importance! When Racine’s characters came on in Louis XIV wigs, the audience was none the less delighted, none the less moved. Why? Because they were witnessing the drama of *man*, not of *men*. (*Etudes historiques, Préface*. See also: Musset, *Namouna*, I, XXIV).

Note G

That a Work Is Beautiful in Proportion as It Is Moving

This is a fixed criterion for our contemporaries. “It is moving, therefore it is beautiful.” *Le Vieil Homme* says one of our oracles (Mme. Séverine) “is neverthe-

less a work of art, for in reading it one's heart beats faster." True, this standard of beauty is not the result of any system; they can not conceive that there might be any other, and it would completely stupefy them to learn that great works exist (such as a Bach fugue, or a tale by Voltaire) which do not cause a single heart-beat.⁷

Here are a few lines from the pen of a seventeenth century society woman, showing how much the lay mind of that time differed from that of to-day:

"So I return to my reading; without prejudice to *Cléopâtre* I have sworn to finish it. Sometimes I wonder whence comes my craze for this idiotic stuff, and cannot account for it. At every moment La Calprenède's style is odious; long romantic passages, ugly words, I feel it all. The other day I wrote a letter to my son in this style, which was amusing. So while I find La Calprenède detestable, I do not the less get stuck in it as in a heap of lime; the beauty of sentiment, the violence of passion, the grandeur of scale, and the miraculous success of their redoubtable swords, I enter

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<sup>7</sup> To-day we come across this kind of aesthetic in people of the highest culture; a prince of letters (André Gide) holds that Anatole France is decidedly not among the greatest because he does not give him a thrill; Anatole France himself declared: "One thing more than any other makes a man's thought attractive — it is inquietude." (*Libido sentiendi.*)

into it all and am carried away like a little girl; and if I had not M. de la Rochefoucauld and M. D'Hacqueville to console me, I should hang myself in disgust at my own weakness." (Mme. de Sévigné to Mme. de Grignan, July 12th, 1674.)

Obviously the emotion she feels — and delights to feel — has no relation to her estimate of the work;<sup>8</sup> she still believes, in spite of the joy in her heart, that the greatness of a work is in proportion to the artistic value it possesses; in other words, that in these matters, the mind must be the sole judge.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, too, (and nothing dates her better) this woman of society reproaches herself for the emotion she feels, and is really ashamed of it. (Can you imagine this in Claude Ferval?) Note also her extraordinary capacity, in the midst of her pleasure, to condemn its cause. Is it really possible for a woman to have so little respect for anything that makes her heart beat? To enjoy something, and at the same time despise it, is essentially a Christian faculty.

<sup>8</sup> Inversely, she greatly admires Bourdaloue, who, she declares elsewhere, "does not move me at all." (Letter, Dec. 25th, 1671.)

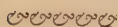
<sup>9</sup> In the same way, Racine in the preface to *Andromaque* praises Madame for not "estimating the goodness of a work solely by the heart."

Note H

Pascal's "*Pensées*"

The book of *Pensées* affords an excellent example of how the development of public taste may be traced through the reception accorded to it by each successive generation. Anatole France<sup>10</sup> rightly says: "The history of the varying criticisms of works of art that have occupied humanity most would make very interesting reading — *Hamlet*, *The Divine Comedy*, or the *Iliad*. Let us add the *Pensées*."

There seems to have been real appreciation throughout the eighteenth century for the intelligent efforts made by the editors of Port-Royal and later by the Abbé Bossut (1779) to bring order into this chaotic work, and to correct its inaccuracies. Far from rejoicing over the formless state in which it was left by the author, they regretted it, and Voltaire seems to have



<sup>10</sup> *La Vie Littéraire*, IV, 9. D'Alembert says much the same in a passage taken by M. Albert Chérel as an epigraph for a learned work on the reputation of Fénelon in the eighteenth century; "There is a book on *The Various Revolutions in the Fortunes of Aristotle*; one might bring out another very interesting and philosophic work on the variations in the reputation of sovereigns and authors. We know that P. Stapfer tried this in the case of several authors."

expressed his contemporaries' views when he deplored the confusion in so many of the thoughts, and even their utter unintelligibility. In the early part of the nineteenth century their incoherence begins to be admired. Editors' attempts to give the work a more ordered form were scorned as "a miserable hut built by an Arab of the desert beside the ruins of Palmyra." In this attack Chateaubriand's motive seems to be Christian rather than æsthetic (the edition to which he took exception was compiled by Condorcet). In the middle of the century, Cousin utters his war-cry against the treason of the Port-Royal edition; what he wishes to exalt in the *Pensées*, however, and what he reproaches Nicole and Roannez for keeping from us, is the perfect liaison between the various parts, and the extremely elaborated quality of the work. M. Cousin's movement was evidently far from being unanimously supported; M. de Saci openly expresses his preference for the edition of 1670; Ch. Nodier (a romantic!) thinks that the changes introduced by Port-Royal would have had Pascal's approval and has little enthusiasm for the "sketchy" nature of the work; the Abbé Maynard, true to the æsthetic which has always done honour to the cloth, maintains that it is treason to the spirit of Pascal not to use discrimination. Finally, towards the end of the century, from Sainte-Beuve, through Brune-

tière to M. Suarès, one of the principle virtues of the *Pensées* is that they are unfinished. This is a revelation of the progress the French aesthetic has made during two hundred years.

Pascal himself seems to have had little respect for the romantic mood which certain of our contemporaries have admired in him so much. In his *Entretien avec M. de Saci* he speaks with but little deference of the type of virtue "which one's imagination personifies as having a severe expression, a savage eye, hair standing on end, a furrowed and perspiring brow, sitting in a strained and painful position, far from men, in mournful silence, alone on the edge of a rock. . . ." We are tempted to recognize in this picture one of his most ardent devotees, who was destined one day to honour him with his august presence, and we ask ourselves, not without anxiety, how Pascal received him.

### Note I

#### . . . The Literary Exploitation of the Christian Mystery

It seems to me that our present-day Christians and their literary representatives tend more than ever before to a somewhat heretical deformation of the mean-

ing of the word "mystery." To orthodox thinkers mystery is truth unknowable except through revelation, rather than something that is in its essence incomprehensible. Mystery contains undoubtedly an element of the unintelligible, but it is not on this attribute that French theology, at least, lays stress. The great teachers of the seventeenth century are particularly definite on this point: "It is a mystery, Christians," declares Bourdaloue, speaking of the resurrection of Christ, "but not an obscure one, or difficult to penetrate." "The concealment of mysteries is no longer necessary; those (the interpreters) who have made themselves obscure have done so for some good reason." (Malaval, *Pratique facile pour élever l'âme à la contemplation*, p. 316.) Let us also quote: "And, I pray you, do not believe that Christian piety is something hidden and unknown, as you tell me. It is a light clearly shown by St. Paul to all Christians and by Our Lord to his disciples and to all who are content to abide by the Gospel and do not seek to read ideas of their own invention into the Christian teachings." (M. Olier, *Lettres Spirituelles*, CXXXII.) There we have a declaration of the knowableness of the Christian dogma. It might be interesting to investigate in what measure society, in its search for inquietude, has made the Christian mystery mysterious.



Note J ❧

*The Romanticism of Reason* ❧

To find out what element of the romantic there is in the apologia of reason of some of our teachers, whose names appear in every book, we need only compare their attitude with that of any seventeenth century writer's treatment of the same subject. Compare for instance the proscription of the abuse of knowledge, the condemnation of the *libido sciendi*, by the author of *L'Avenir de L'Intelligence* and by Malebranche (*De la curiosité ou de l'inclination pour les choses nouvelles ou extraordinaires; du désir de la science.*) (1); or again by Nicole (*De la manière d'étudier chrétiennement* XIII). It is really the difference between the same moral theme as treated by Ezekiel and by Xenophon.

The eulogies bestowed daily on the high-priest of the *Action Française* for "returning to the manners of the classic style" make us smile when we consider his enthusiasm for his own doctrines, the violence of his arguments, and especially the virulent, contemptuous tone he uses towards his adversary (mild it is true, beside that of Bossuet toward Cromwell, or Jurieu, or even that of Chateaubriand toward Voltaire). On this subject, let us recall certain declarations of the classic

spirit; there is Pellisson objecting to "those who defend the truth too warmly and at the wrong moment, without courtesy and without discretion"; there is Buffon (*Discours sur le Style*) recommending that "inward persuasion be not marked by too great an enthusiasm, and that there shall be always more frankness than self-confidence, more reasoning than heat"; and especially Nicole (*Des moyens de conserver la paix entre les hommes*, I. 9) suggesting that in controversy "it is not our opinions that shock others so much as the proud, presumptuous, impassioned, contemptuous and insulting air with which we express them"; and "we must learn to refute politely," and again that "it is enough that we persuade our adversaries that they are wrong or are mistaken, without making them feel, by cruel and humiliating words, that we do not credit them with a spark of reason." You will agree that such classic doctrines have been somewhat forgotten by M. Ch. Maurras. We are quite ready to admit that, following these precepts, little headway can be made with the masses. Apostleship can never be classic.

In *Anthinea*, and *L'Avenir de L'Intelligence* we have the classic spirit taken as the theme of romantic exaltation; just as Mme. de Staël's work on Germany is the eulogy of the romantic soul by a classicist. That, however, is a somewhat romantic antithesis.

Note K

*A Propos of a Pamphlet by Péguy,  
Entitled: Note on M. Bergson and  
the Bergsonian Philosophy*

In June 1915 an Italian review (*Coenobium*) published an article in praise of this pamphlet, in the course of which we were attacked. We ask the reader's permission to place before him the reply we made to the author of the article — a reply which emphasizes certain features of the contemporary aesthetic:

"I confess I do not quite understand, my dear sir, the distinction which you — and Péguy — draw between *rigid reasoning* and *supple reasoning*, nor yet the necessity to adapt the latter to the phenomena of life because of their suppleness. My opinion is that since all phenomena — and not particularly those of life — are supple (I mean complex and variable) the only reasoning applicable in all cases is supple reasoning. In other words, reasoning either is, or is not, supple; what you call rigid reasoning I should call — and you would doubtless agree with me — stupidity or pedantry.

"But this supple reasoning which seems to me tantamount to intelligence has nothing whatever to do with putting oneself into the "inside" of the phenomenon

of life, or with "experiencing the vital urge" to the exclusion of all reason, which constitutes — with apologies to Péguy — the Bergsonian intuition.

"Neither can I agree with you, sir, in the synonym which you establish between "abstraction" and "rigidity." It seems to me that the abstract is extremely variable. Passing over the example which higher mathematics provides, and keeping within the field of philosophy, I need no further proof than a certain *Réponse aux Objections* of Descartes, or again, reverting to the phenomena of life, the *Attempts to Define Life* of Herbert Spencer in his *Principles of Biology*.

"I have said above that by suppleness of thought I meant its complexity, its variableness. If that is the suppleness our contemporaries enjoy, I agree with you, sir, that they deserve nothing but praise. But I believe that the suppleness they enjoy is not the complexity of the thought, which really is an interrupted scale of concepts, but is the absence of concepts, the thought in its pure fluidity of feeling, in its refusal to be frozen into an intellectual affirmation. "With periods (concepts)," says Bergson, "however split-up, you can never achieve movement." It is this movement that they desire, precisely because it rules out all concepts whatsoever. I confess that the taste for such suppleness looks to

me like a taste for pure sensation, in which I find little to admire.

“To get down to this question of rigid and supple reasoning, I think perhaps you mean, sir, the famous distinction which Pascal drew between the geometric mind and the subtle mind. In that case, may I say: first, I have never failed to recognize the supreme value of the subtle mind (which I call intuitive intelligence as opposed to discursive intelligence) and have pointed out (*Sur le Succès du Bergsonisme*, p. 108 and fol.) that it is at the base of almost all scientific discovery. This subtleness of mind, however, does not appear to me particularly necessary for biological or psychological discovery, as some would have us believe, nor, moreover, does it seem necessary that it should be sufficient unto itself, and capable of dispensing with the geometric and reflective mind in scientific work; secondly, the subtle mind — or swift, vivid, intuitive intelligence, *but intelligence* — has nothing in common with the Bergsonian intuition or abdication of all forms of intelligence in favour of the vital urge. I am constantly at war against this same equivocation. Bergson is always taken to be one who exalts the subtler forms of intelligence, which naturally brings sensitive minds to his support, whereas really he exalts an un-intellectual state which rules out every form of intelli-

gence, subtle or not subtle, in favour of a pure vital urge; a doctrine which these same sensitive minds immediately repudiate, leaving the mystics in sole possession, as soon as they realize its true significance.

“When Péguy declares that there is a more profound understanding of man in a chorus of *Antigone* than in the works of Kant, I venture to say that he is drawing a parallel between things which are without any relation one to another, except by a misuse of words. What relation is there between the understanding of man as expressed in a passage of Sophocles, and the understanding of his thinking capacity which *The Critique of Pure Reason* seeks to establish? What Péguy meant (and it is the basis of all his thought) was that the understanding of man’s heart interests him, whereas the understanding of his thinking capacity does not interest him. It was simply his judgment of values, the expression of his own preference.

“It seems to me that this preference of Péguy’s, fundamental as it is, cannot be too strongly emphasized, if we are to understand what his work amounts to and particularly wherein it fails. What interested Péguy was life, struggle and the reactions of the soul; ideas, as such, bored him to extinction, as all his friends will tell you. People who delighted in them seemed to him childish, and worthy only of contempt. His last work,



on the Bergsonian philosophy, is an admirable lyric outpouring (peculiarly touching as it was written on the eve of his death) in praise of human love, of courage, of struggle and of philosophy in so far as it possesses the elements of struggle. The question of the Bergsonian ideas as ideas and of their justification is practically ignored. Moreover, he himself has stated (see his Note, p. 68) that the man who considers a philosophy with the intention of establishing its rightness or wrongness simply shows that '*he does not know what he is talking about.*' Let us not insult him by supposing that he did what he so despised in others!

I am, etc."

### Note L

*... The Women of That Time  
Had a Respect for the Masculine  
Type of Mind and Valued Their  
Own in Proportion as They Ap-  
proached It*

Equal capacity for intellectual activity was the principal claim made by the women of the old régime for their sex. Mlle. de Gournay, Mme. des Roches, Mlle. de Romieu (See V. du Bled, *La Société Française*,



XVIe. et XVIIe. Siècles) all praised their aptitude for knowledge. One heroine of the *Caquets de l' Accouchée* (6me. Journée), in trying to demonstrate the superiority of her sex, finds proof of it in the fact that "if we cast our eye on science, the arts and trades, inventions and all practical occupations, most of these will be found to have developed from a woman's brain," and that there has been so great a number of "women of great mental capacity, who have ruled, held together and governed" kingdoms. A society woman in *Les Grands Jours d'Auvergne* has a grievance because she feels that her sex is not credited with "the habit of reasoning," etc., etc.

The present-day insistence on being given credit for qualities peculiar to her sex, and in which the male is lacking (spontaneity, instinctivism, intuitionism, is accompanied by a haughty contempt for the male and a certain desire to tease and torment him, which has no counterpart in earlier times. (A whole book could be written on the history of the relation between the sexes in good society.) Can one imagine a society woman of to-day writing to an ambassador, as Mme. de Sévigné wrote to the Duc de Chaulnes: "I humbly kiss your Excellency's hands" or to M. Clemenceau, as Mme. de Chevreuse to Richelieu: "I am your servant"? On the contrary, no matter what the man's rank may be (ex-

cept perhaps in the case of a Church dignitary) do not our contemporary women express a conscious superiority, derived solely from their womanhood, which they insist he shall recognize? For a striking contrast turn to the letters received by simple men of the world, like Bussy, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère or the Président de Bosses from women correspondents. What a footing of perfect equality! What a complete absence of any sense of distance! How far they are from any idea that they are doing the man an honour in talking with him! A real democracy, is this social élite!

There are still other reasons for this new attitude of women towards the male sex in modern society. First, they alone of their class are now leading an easy, leisured existence; man is killing himself with work — and for them. How could they be otherwise than contemptuous towards him, unless they were imbued with extraordinarily high moral principles, of which there seems little or no indication? Furthermore, being the only ones who have leisure, they are more and more becoming the only ones who have culture, and here again we cannot expect that nobility of feeling should curb their sense of superiority. Besides, their contempt for men is shared by the men themselves. I know men who are directing huge enterprises, employing thousands of workmen, revolutionizing industry, and

changing the face of the world; their wives consider themselves vastly superior, because they get up at mid-day and tinkle a little Schumann on the piano — and the men entirely agree with them!

Alongside, and yet in a sense in contradistinction to, this teasing attitude on women's part, we should mention another form of bad taste which has made its appearance in the relations between the sexes: the desire for *camaraderie*. Need we say that this has nothing in common with the relations mentioned above between the Président de Broses and his feminine correspondents?

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